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STUDIES IN THE  
BENGAL RENAISSANCE

# STUDIES IN THE BENGAL RENAISSANCE

*In commemoration of the birth centenary of  
Bipinchandra Pal*

*edited by*  
ATULCHANDRA GUPTA

The National Council of Education, Bengal  
Jadavpur

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BORN 7 NOVEMBER 1858

DIED 20 MAY 1932

*Bipin Chandra Pal*





## FOREWORD

The National Council of Education is happy to have this opportunity of presenting to the reading public a volume of historical studies on the renaissance in our country, in commemoration of the birth-centenary of one of the makers of modern Bengal.

Bipinchandra Pal was undoubtedly one of our foremost patriots and the Council recalls with pride its association with him; it may not be generally known that he was our Rector in the years 1927 and 1928. The National Council itself was the product of a heroic moment, the far-famed Swadeshi upsurge, a climax in the history of our renaissance. For half a century now, it has endeavoured in its humble way to carry forward the heritage of that glorious epoch.

The literature on the awakening of the 19th and the early 20th centuries is, of course, enormous; but there has been a noticeable lack of any comprehensive and adequate survey in one handy volume for the general reader. It was indeed a happy thought to try to remove this long-felt want and provide at the same time something like a memorial to one of the greatest representatives of the age.

Much of the story of the period, familiar enough perhaps to the Bengalis, remains still unknown to others. For this reason, English was chosen as the vehicle of these essays to reach the wider circle outside.

Our best thanks are due to the writers of the different sections who have responded so ungrudgingly to a labour of love and to Sri Atulchandra Gupta who sponsored the scheme and steered it to fulfilment. The Council would like also to put on record its deep appreciation of the work of the Centenary Committee which shouldered the difficult task of organising the compilation of a volume of such considerable size with noteworthy success.

Bipinchandra Pal was a prophet of the New Spirit in the annals of our nationalism, the unforgettable spokesman of the youth of his time. It was therefore in the fitness of things that the young students of the School of Printing Technology in Bengal's capital city came forward to undertake the entire production of the volume dedicated to his memory. This was a unique experiment and the rapid printing of a book of this size is a proof of their ability. And it is not unreasonable to hope that the indulgent reader will overlook, in the execution of such a big task, blemishes including a certain number of misprints.

To perpetuate the memory of Bipinchandra Pal the Council proposes to endow medals or prizes, at the three Universities of Visva-Bharati, Calcutta and Jadavpur, from the amount that may be available out of the sale proceeds of the book.

*Sasanka Sekhar Bagchi*

*Hony. Secretary  
National Council of Education, Bengal  
1 December 1958*

## INTRODUCTION

Bipinchandra Pal was born in 1858 and died in 1932. These three quarters of a century cover not an inconsiderable period of time which we are used to call the age of Bengal Renaissance. With many of the later phases of the movement Bipinchandra Pal was personally connected. India, as it is to-day, is largely the product of this renaissance. It was thought that, on the occasion of the centenary of Bipinchandra Pal's birth, publication of a volume describing and evaluating within moderate compass the main aspects of the Bengal Renaissance would be a fitting tribute to his memory. This book is an attempt at realising this idea. Different aspects of the subject have been dealt with here by different writers.

In 'Bengal Renaissance' the term 'renaissance' has no doubt been copied from the celebrated European Renaissance after the end of what Europeans call their dark ages, when the Graeco-Roman civilisation had become extinct. But different or slightly similar things are often called by the same name. It would be worse than useless, or quite misleading, if owing to this similarity of names we try to find out to our satisfaction, and such attempts rarely fail, deeper and real similarities between the great European and the parochial Bengal renaissance in their causes and development. It may be said that the discovery of the literature and the cultural creations of Greece and of Graeco-Roman age and the consequent contact with them stirred and started the European renaissance. And similarly the conquest and occupation of a large part of India by the English East India Company brought Bengal into contact with the civilisation and culture of Europe, ancient and modern, and caused the Bengal renaissance. This facile comparison and analogy seem obvious. But it misses altogether the difference between the two contacts and their consequences.

To mediaeval Europe the discovery of classical literature and civilisation was one of joyful wonder, and the contact resulted, generally speaking, in unquestioned acceptance and avid assimilation. But the Bengali-European contact and its results were not such simple and straight phenomena. European civilisation contacted Bengal in two ways, viz. the civilisation of Christianity, and the civilisation which has revived the free questing mind of ancient Greece and under its inspiration and on its foundation has built up and was building a civilisation in which the quest of mind for truth rationally uninfluenced by dogmas and tradition is incessant and intense and the truths so discovered are unquestionably accepted as truths about the universe. A majority of those Europeans who brought Bengal in contact with European civilisation and were its most enthusiastic propagandists laid great emphasis on the religious or Christian aspect of their civilisation. It appears that they somehow came to think that the Europe of reason and knowledge has some esoteric connection with the Christianity it professed and practised. And that the Indian heathens who did not accept that faith can have no entry into the world of European enlightenment. So their attempt was to prove the doctrinal superiority of Christianity to idol-worshipping polytheistic Hinduism. This attempt to evangelise the polytheistic idol-worshipping Hindus met with the strongest opposition not only from the orthodox Hindus, but also from those in Bengal who welcomed with the utmost enthusiasm the other aspect of European civilisation, viz. the Europe of rational free thought and inquiry. The Christian missionaries knew very imperfectly with what subtlety of dialectic the position of this polytheistic idol-worship could be defended against any positive religious creed.

To this Rammohan Roy hinted when in a short Bengali essay in the *Brahman Sevadhi* he said in 1821 that if the Christians desire to establish by the strength of argument the falsity of Hinduism and the superiority of Christianity

let them not in contempt desist from arguing with the Brahmin Pandits because they were poor, living in small huts, and eating only cheap vegetables. Furthermore, to prove the falsity of another religion is not to prove the truth of one's own. In a brilliant satire in the form of a conversation between a Christian missionary and his three Chinese disciples, Rammohan shows the ludicrousness of the attempt to prove rationally the central truth of orthodox Christianity.

The first kind of contact between Bengal and European civilisation, viz. the religious, therefore, did not result in acceptance and assimilation but in conflict and repudiation. And ultimately the evangelical attempt was routed. This is why what may be called the first phase of Bengal renaissance was full of religious disquisition and controversy. This is reflected in many of the contributions to our volume. They also show how this conflict and controversy led to the search of what Hindu religious thought really was, undegenerated by superstition and inhuman customs which had gathered round it and passed as Hinduism in actual life and practice. This controversy also made Bengal renaissance conscious that there are spheres of knowledge and experience in which the European approach is not necessarily the true or full approach. Maharshi Debendranath's *Tattvabodhini Patrika* contributed to foster this idea. And in course of time in the cultivated Bengali mind an idea or argument ceases to be acceptable just because it was accepted in Europe. It required confirmation by reason universal. The attitude began long ago and is continuing but has not gained the strength desired. True freedom of mind frees the mind from the fetters of the freedom-giver.

The second aspect of the Bengali-European contact, viz. what we may call the contact with the Greek in Europe, was of course quite different in reception and result. It was welcomed with open arms and assimilated as life-giving nectar not only by Young Bengal of Hindu College boys, but also by such a great Sanskrit Pandit as Iswarchandra Vidyasagar. If the Hindu College boys, Derozians as they

may be called, were somewhat boisterous and full of bravado in showing their contempt for the social and religious conventions of the time in which they lived, the Pandit was no less severe in his condemnation. But the Derozian boys were young, and felt the atmosphere stifling and that no rational advance in thought, knowledge and life was at all possible unless the existing atmosphere was dissipated at all costs. The fetter must be burst whatever the means. Who can say with certainty that they were wrong? When we speak of moderate but more effective ways we perhaps think of later and better days, when the first violent onrush had made openings in the wall, and it was easier to march past in methodical ranks. Derozians could adapt themselves to the times and move forward. They had expressed themselves in the English language and thought this to be the most natural and reasonable thing to do. Yet, Michael Madhusudan, a Derozian if there was one, became one of the greatest poets of the Bengali language and was the founder of the modern Bengali poetry.

This reception and assimilation form the foundation of what is now the life of Bengal. But it would seem that Bengal assimilated from its contact with Europe the progressive Europe of free thought and positive knowledge almost in spite of the desire and attempt of the majority of the Europeans who brought about the Bengal-Europe contact. The controversy amongst the Orientalists and the Occidentalists as to the kind of education to be introduced in Bengal and the differing opinions indicate this truth. Bengali reception was Bengal's own choice, and not of what the political masters desired the country to choose.

The reception awakened the Bengali mind and roused its creative activity. The results, direct and less or more remote, in the achievements and efforts in poetry and literature, arts and science, political activity and thought, journalism, social reconstruction, religious ideas and activity, education, freeing the country from foreign political domination, and

the nationalism of that awakened mind are reviewed in their principal aspects in the contributions to this volume.

Their rich variety is striking, and diversity somewhat bewildering. For, it is difficult to know where properly to stop in describing the effects of such a phenomenon as the Bengal renaissance. The beginning and end of all historical movements are more or less arbitrary, specially the end of a movement like the Bengal renaissance the very nature of which is to go on producing effects of new and multiple varieties. If renaissance is the awakening of new life, life goes on creating things new, many often beyond *prima facie* imagination. From proper perspective the attitude of Bengali intellectuals towards the Sepoy Rising of 1857 and the Bengali extremism and terrorism of the early twentieth century would not appear to be accidental happenings in mere passage of time, but events in the sequence of the logic of history. So is the dissatisfaction over education, so joyfully accepted at the beginning of the renaissance, as the source of dire evils and the call for National Education.

It is likely to seem to one who reads through the contributions in this volume that the political contact of Britain with India and the dissolution of that contact form a more or less close-knit history of great human interest. The time of this political contact, judged by the periods of India's history, is not long. It has now come to a close. The intellectual and cultural contact continues. What its future will be depends on the future development of intellectual and cultural life of Britain and India. And who can foresee the future? But from things as they are at present, it would seem that this contact will continue long to the benefit of India, and to the benefit of Britain.

*Atul Chandra Gupta.*

7 December 1958





# I

## ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THE CENTURY

*Narendra Krishna Sinha*

The assumption of the government by the British, reliance on English ideas and methods, necessarily introduced great changes in India. Economic measures of the new government and new economic forces brought about a very rapid economic transformation. The old order was changing throughout the second half of the eighteenth century. But what happened between 1790 and 1833 turned India's economy into another channel along which it flowed for more than a century.

Spinning and weaving were the great national industry of India next after agriculture. Weaving was a very widespread domestic industry. Thread was spun by women of all castes both in town and country. The production of salt, saltpeter and raw silk also provided employment to groups of people in different parts of the country. There was almost full employment and practically no landless proletariat. British attempts to establish a class of revenue farmers who would be helpful associates in extracting wealth from land failed completely. The Zamindars continued to maintain their hold on land. There was some sub-infeudation but not on a very extensive scale. The relation of a *ryot* to Zamindar was neither that of proprietor nor of a vassal but a compound of both. But the tillage rights which the *ryots* possessed were never investigated by their

new rulers. British Indian administration preferred a simple mechanism of land-revenue collection. There was no noticeable capital investment by the British in India even at the end of the eighteenth century. The Company's servants relied mainly upon the Indian *banians* for the supply of capital with which to carry on private trade. After the passing of Pitt's India Act and the reforms of Cornwallis, the Company's servants disappeared from trade in the eastern seas. The East Indian agency houses, financed to a large extent by the Company's servants, became the characteristic unit of private trade in the east. The British free merchants in India became conspicuous after 1793, indigo, opium and coasting trade opening up new avenues. This was the state of things about the time of the Permanent Settlement.

The Cornwallis system of administration and the irresistible power of the new manufacturing interests of Britain were the new economic forces operating in India at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The disappearance of domestic industries followed closely on the wake of the Permanent Settlement. The Permanent Settlement cannot therefore be studied in isolation. Another aspect of the changed economic situation should be borne in mind. According to the Reporter of External Commerce, the circulating native capital in Calcutta between 1797 and 1801 was 16 *kröres*. The Cornwallis system of administration deprived the *banians* of their business as agents, British agents taking their place. The scope of indigenous banking became narrower. Lucrative contracts or sub-contracts were given only to Europeans. The 'native' capitalists began to invest in houses, lands and government loans. But the Court of Directors' order was to buy out the native holders of paper. They also passed order to draw interest bills which would be beneficial to Europeans alone. Cornwallis wrote to the Court of Directors: "there is every ground to expect that the large capitals possessed by the natives which they have no means of employing when the public debt is dis-

charged will be applied to the purchase of landed property as soon as the tenure is declared to be secured." People not traditionally associated with land began to invest in land. It would not perhaps be an exaggeration to say that all sections of the people were pushed towards land. The increasingly large number and variety of under-tenures added to the complexity of the land system. But the benefits of a Permanent Settlement were not extended to the cultivators. To protect land-revenue greater power of distraint was granted to the Zamindars by Reg. VII of 1799. Thus was created a total and absolute property in land which did not exist before. Very soon land was bought at revenue sales at about 15 years' purchase. The pre-existing relationship between the Zamindar and *ryot* was completely annihilated. The problem of creating new relationship was not faced until 1859, when the occupancy right of the *ryots* was for the first time conceded. British Indian administration gave no thought to the welfare of the peasantry—"no business of ours" they thought. *Laisser Faire* did its mischief in India as in England. In defence of British administrators it has been pointed out that the protection of the cultivator against the Zamindar kept pace fairly well with factory legislation and the control of child welfare in England. Land became the principal field of 'native' capital investment. A formidable rival to British capital investment in India was thus removed.

Domestic industry was almost completely destroyed within about a quarter of a century. As Montgomery Martin pointed out in 1840, this was not in the fair course of trade. He said: "We have during this period compelled the Indian territories to receive our manufactures, our woollen duty free, our cottons at  $2\frac{1}{2}$  p.c., while we have continued during that period to levy prohibitory duties from 10 to 1000 p.c. upon articles they produce from our territories.... a free trade from this country not a free trade between India and this country." The disappearance of domestic handicrafts was a very quick process. Population increased, but manufactures disappeared.

The weaver cum cultivator became merely a cultivator. The *malangi* or salt worker who had his patch of land had to depend entirely on it now for his subsistence. Thus was created the greatest under-employment problem. Tens of millions of farmers were doomed to idleness for half the time—there was perhaps less than one acre of land per head of agricultural population. As there was not enough land to go round, there was henceforth a landless proletariat. Rural pauperisation pushed these masses to the plantations or to the colonies. In the agrarian economy of India—in the life of the *ryot*—the village moneylender began to play a part which was not less important than that of the Zamindar. The moneylenders were mostly survivors of the old trading classes—the *setts*, *shroffs* and *chetties*.

The Charter Act of 1833 opened a new outlet for British capital and British commercial enterprise in India. The Court of Directors' despatch on the Charter Act insisted on their servants' keeping in view the Parliament's intention of opening of the interior of India to Europeans. They emphasised that the Regulations must not be such as to harass the European with unnecessary restraints. Casual misconduct must not be made the occasion of harsh legislation. The restraints which the Regulations of 7 May 1824 and 17 February 1828 laid on the acquisition and ownership of land by Europeans were, according to the Directors, partly intended for the protection of the European buyers rather than for that of the 'natives'. Bengal Chamber of Commerce was founded in 1834. It became the spearhead of European capital in India. European capitalist enterprise began in silk, indigo, tea and coffee. The agency houses gave place to the managing agency system. This opened India to the full impact of the Industrial Revolution in England. Transit duties were abolished in 1835 as a result of Charles Trevelyan's famous report. Thus was created a huge Indian market for British goods. There was henceforth free import of surplus capital from England. Larger and cheaper banking facilities for European business could be organised in India. The system

of production was completely geared to the needs of industrialised Britain. Commercial policy was calculated to ensure production of raw materials in India for British industries and the consumption of British manufactures in India.

Europeans' right to own land conceded by the Charter Act, 1833, led to the plantation system. Oppression and lawlessness became associated with the plantation system. It was too much to expect moderation from those who were intent only on making money and who had no traditional restraints or enlarged views. Famine was considered to be a problem of distribution. Except for fifteen years between 1880 and 1895 there were not five consecutive years free from famine between 1866 and 1900. The first place in famine prevention works was not assigned to irrigation but to railways. English merchants naturally looked to the opening of distant markets in India. New lines of communication were therefore opened. Concessions were granted to British companies and new lines were pushed perhaps beyond the urgent needs of India.

England had no plan for the development of India's resources. There was in India growing poverty and decadence. It has been pointed out that frequent famines in India were only an indication of a greater evil, the permanent poverty of Indians even in ordinary years. The Indian peasant was absolutely without any savings. After paying his dues to the Zamindar in the Zamindari areas and to the State where some form of Ryotwari Settlement prevailed and after meeting his obligations to the village moneylender, the cultivator had very little left to him above his subsistence even in years of good harvest.

Land-revenue was in many areas even 60 p.c. of the rental. The mass of the revenue was drawn from the rural districts. As Lord Salisbury, Secretary of State for India, pointed out: "It is not in itself a thrifty policy to draw the mass of revenue from the rural districts, where capital is scarce, sparing the towns where it is redundant and runs to waste in luxury.

As India must be bled, the lancet should be directed to the parts where the blood is congested, or at least sufficient, not to those which are already feeble from the want of it." Manufacture was crippled, agriculture was overtaxed. Much of the revenue was exported without an equivalent. At the beginning of the century there was the East India Company's 'Investment'—export of cotton piecegoods, raw silk, saltpeter etc. from the surplus revenue of the country. The 'Investment' system ceased in 1813; the Home Charges crept in, increased progressively, amounting in 1900-1 to 17 millions sterling.

Modern Industrialism in India commenced under the ægis of British capital in woollen mills, jute mills, paper mills etc. The Parsi community in Bombay had become quite early in the history of British trade in the eastern seas junior partners in British enterprise in trade and commerce. There was a change in their attitude towards the last decades of the nineteenth century. There was some diversion of capital owned by this community from commerce to industry. The Indian cotton mills started in Bombay needed all the protection in the world. But fiscal policy was dictated by Lancashire. The import duty on coarse cotton goods was surrendered by Lord Lytton's government in 1875. But that was not enough. An unjust excise tax was imposed on the products of Indian mills in 1894 on such Indian goods as competed with Lancashire goods. In 1896 an excise duty was imposed on all cotton goods produced in India. This was the greatest act of fiscal injustice. "It threw a burden on Indian mills which competed with no mills in Europe."

The system established by Lord Cornwallis was based upon the principle of doing everything by European agency. Only very inferior public services were manned by Indians. Lord William Bentinck substituted for this a system by which public business was transacted by native agency under European superintendence. Bentinck started recruiting 'native' Deputy Collectors in 1833. The cadre of 'native' Deputy

Magistrates was instituted in 1843. The middle class looked for eminence in the public services and in the new professions. This new middle class based on land, on professions and on public services had no roots in indigenous commerce and industry. In India the business man was traditionally a *bania*, separated from the craft or intellectual classes. But during the years 1757—1785 the principal businessmen in Calcutta were mostly higher caste Hindus. In the petition presented by 95 of the principal 'native' inhabitants of Calcutta in 1766 against hanging a man for forgery more than eighty were high caste Hindus with such surnames as Mukherjee, Banerjee, Sarma, Tagore, Dutta, Mitra, Ghosh, Sen etc. Most of them were Calcutta *banians*. This class of people disappeared from business by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Once again Indian business—whatever it was—fell into the hands of those who belonged to the trader caste. They were very capable financiers but they were not technically competent nor were they possessed of professional standards of integrity.

The economic weakness of the Muslim middle class in the nineteenth century very much influenced the history of India from the beginning of the twentieth century. At the time of the establishment of British power in India the Muslims were the ruling class and they were the lowest class. The British centres—Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were remote from the Muslim centres—Lucknow, Delhi and Lahore. By the time British administrative machinery was installed in the old Muslim centres there were, as it has been said, established traditions and connections in which the Muslims did not find any place. In the services, in the professions and even in inland trade the Hindus were now well-established. Communalism, when it came, became so effective because of the difference in the economic level between the two communities. Government's political manoeuvre—divide et impera—began about 1870. Economic conditions were conducive to the policy; "communalism needs only to be well started and then it thrives of itself".



## 2

RAJA RAMMOHAN ROY

(1772-1833)

*Prabhat Chandra Ganguli*

The most prominent feature of the Nineteenth Century in India is the rapid transition from mediævalism to modernism and the inaugurator of this transformation being Raja Rammohan Roy, he is rightly called the Father of Modern India. Rabindranath Tagore has aptly summed up his greatness by the following tribute: "He is a great path-maker of this century who has removed ponderous obstacles that impeded our progress at every step, and initiated us into the present era of world-wide co-operation of humanity".

The strongest passion of his soul was love of freedom of action and thought from all shackles that bind the mind. "He would be free or not be at all" is the verdict on his character by his great friend, admirer and disciple, Rev. William Adam. This burning passion which was kindled in his mind when he was very young led him when he was barely sixteen years of age to go to Tibet, a journey which is still perilous and at that time almost an impossible task, so that he might know the truth underlying the great Hindu religion which was artfully hidden from the general people through the artifices of the Brahmin priestcraft.

Through his studies Rammohan came to the conclusion that many of the ills through which the Indian people was

suffering were due to outworn social usages like the rigid enclosures of caste and creed. In a letter written to his friend, James Silk-Buckingham, dated 18 January 1818, he himself gave expression to this thought of his: "I regret to say that the present system of religion adhered to by the Hindus is not well calculated to promote their political interests. The distinction of castes, introducing innumerable divisions and sub-divisions among them, has entirely deprived them of patriotic feeling and the multitude of religious rites and ceremonies and the laws of purification have totally disqualified them from undertaking any difficult enterprises". He concludes this long letter by saying that "It is necessary that some change should take place in their religion, at least for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort." He felt deeply about the necessity of getting rid of those soul-killing accretions to religion which were the outcome of degeneration and corruption due partly to priestcraft and partly to historical and social causes. But he had a profound respect for the original purity of the doctrine and practice of Hindu religion.

In his *Brahmunical Magazine* Rammohan evaluated Hinduism thus: "It is well known to the whole world, that no people on earth are more tolerant than the Hindoos, who believe all men to be equally within the reach of Divine beneficence, which embraces the good of every religious sect and denomination." Perhaps by being born in a strictly religious family he inherited this rich heritage of true Hinduism which awakened in him a desire to learn the good of other great religions. By his intensive studies of these other great religions he came to conclude that the core of all religions is the same and their contents are fundamentally identical. He also recognised that all great religions are moving along their own lines of historic tradition towards an universal ideal, though they will not merge but continue to grow along their own path of historic continuity. Thus with him the world saw the birth of comparative religion.

Rammohan's mind was alert enough to perceive that it is not beneficial for an individual or a nation to be cut asunder from the national moorings drifting away from the natural environment to untested new moorings, however ennobling and great those newer moorings might be.

His love of Freedom made him lead a crusade against social, economical and political wrongs and superstition. The vastness of his activity in those fields is such that it is impossible to discuss them within a short compass. Rabindranath has epitomised it briefly. He wrote thus: "To every sphere of our national existence he brought the sagacity of a comprehensive vision, the spirit of self-manifestation of the unique in the light of the Universal".

Rammohan's programme of religious reform led him to embrace social reforms also. In social policy his freedom-loving mind naturally led to emphasis on the natural rights of man, *viz.*, rights to life, liberty and property as also the right of freedom of speech, opinion, conscience and association. He fought valiantly to do away with caste and its concomittant evils and the subjugation of women to the selfish interests of the male sex. He prayed for the restitution of the rightful legal claims of women from which they were wantonly deprived; he ably defended their right of inheritance and carried on a tirade against the cruel practice of burning widows alive on the funeral pyre of their husbands as also the nefarious practice of polygamy which was the main cause of prevalence of suicide among married women.

Rammohan was never afraid to espouse a cause which he considered to be right; without fear of social ostracism and social persecution he would unequivocally condemn those practices which he considered unjust and inequitable. In his eye women were unjustifiably denied many rights to which they are entitled by nature. In his well-known tract on the *Suttee* he boldly questioned the prevailing idea that women are inferior in point of understanding, as also the charge of want of resolution on the part of womenfolk.

Though most of his energies were spent in the early part of his career in polemics, Rammohan's mind gradually turned as Dr. Brojendranath Sil has pointed out "from theory to practice, from doctrine to institution, from polemics to reform." He was both a theoretician and a practitioner. The field of education in India at his time was held by the champions of Oriental learning brushing aside the claims of the Western mode of education. Rammohan's alert mind swayed towards the Western mode because he was convinced that without a grounding in modern sciences we would not be able to hold our own against Europeans in the economic and political field. His *Letter on English Education* is a masterpiece of erudition.

To give practical shape to his ideas, Rammohan started a school named Anglo-India School. This school was far ahead of similar institutions. The *Calcutta Gazette* of 28 February 1829 editorially remarked about it: "The greater portion of its expenses is paid by one of the most liberal and enlightened of native gentlemen—one whose name has been long before the world, whose talents are surpassed only by his worth, and whose efforts to ameliorate the intellectual condition of his countrymen, can never be too highly appreciated. It must always be to him a pleasing prospect, that when millions yet unborn shall hail the return of knowledge of this country, they will associate that circumstance with the name of Rammohan Roy".

He was convinced that our mother tongue should be enriched so that it can be a good vehicle of thought in which direction the Bengali language was at that time very deficient. He compiled a grammar of that language and created a style which was elegant. To consider him the Father of Bengali literary prose is not far from the truth.

Rammohan was not only a religious and social reformer, a literateur and educationist, a jurist and a journalist, he was also a politician of outstanding merit and was, perhaps, our first visionary to envisage a League of Nations. Rabin-

dranath spoke about the cardinal point of his views about human relation : "Rammohan was the only person in his time, in the whole world of man, to realise completely the significance of the Modern Age. He knew that the ideal of human civilization does not lie in the isolation of independence, but in the brotherhood of inter-dependence of individuals as well as nations in all spheres of thought and activity".

To make this point clearer we need only look at the Raja's own statement about this in his famous letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France. In it he says that "un-biassed commonsense as well as the accurate deductions of scientific research lead to the conclusion that all mankind are one great family of which numerous nations and tribes existing are only various branches. Hence enlightened men in all countries feel a wish to encourage and facilitate human intercourse in every manner by removing as far as possible all impediments to it in order to promote the reciprocal advantage and enjoyment of the whole human race".

After enumerating his concept of human oneness, Rammohan goes on to observe: "It appears to me, ends of constitutional Government might be better attained by submitting every matter of political difference between two countries to a Congress composed of an equal number from the parliament of each; the decision of the majority to be acquired in by both nations.....By such Congress all matters of difference, whether political or economical, affecting the nature of any two civilised countries with constitutional Governments, might be settled amicably and justly to the satisfaction of both and profound peace and friendly feelings might be preserved between them from generation to generation". He was far ahead of his time in finding out a workable mode of preserving international peace and amity and it took near about a century for the political thinkers to evolve a workable scheme of a world parliament.

How could such a man, who was so very sensitive to the slightest encroachment on the liberty of any nation in any part of the world, and who went in joyous rapture on learning about a subjugated nation being able to throw off the yoke of bondage (this found expression for example on the news of the establishment of constitutional government in Spain, on the news of the second French Revolution, on the painful news of Neapolitians being "crushed back to servitude" soon after their "extorting a constitution from their despotic king"), be so oblivious of India's bondage? To careful students of Rammohan's mind, it is not at all paradoxical but a logical outcome of his mode of thinking. He was convinced that India by virtue of its geographical position and vastness of its population can either prove to be a useful, profitable and willing "ally of the British Empire or troublesome and annoying as a determined enemy"; but for this India should at least have one fourth of knowledge and energy that the Irishmen possessed at that time.

In a letter to the paper *Reformer* (run by his friend and disciple Prasanna Kumar Tagore) from England Rammohan explained his stand on Indian affairs. He wrote in that letter: "The progress that we have made in India as to the knowledge of politics, is by no means equal to that made here by the English; I, therefore, beg to observe that moderation and prudence should not be lost sight of by our countrymen. We should not be too hasty and too sanguine in raising our condition, since gradual improvements are more durable. Though it is impossible for a thinking man not to feel the evils of political subjugation and dependence on foreign people, yet when we reflect on the advantages which we have derived from our connection with Great Britain, we may be reconciled to the present state of things which promises permanent benefit to our posterity".

Rammohan expressed similar feelings in another letter which he wrote to Victor Jacquemont. He said: "India requires many more years of English domination so that she

might not have many things to lose while she is reclaiming her political independence”.

Long before Karl Marx propounded the theory about the role of middle class people in shaping revolution, Rammohan's vision clearly saw this development. In his paper *The Bengal Herald* he welcomed the advent of the middle class in India. He wrote: “A class of society has sprang into existence, that were before unknown, these are placed between aristocracy and the poor and are daily forming a most influential class.....It is a dawn of new Era—when ever such an order of men have been created, freedom has followed its train”. After comparing the condition of the people of Poland and Spain where the middle class had not been yet born with the condition of the people of those countries having a middle class, Rammohan wrote in that article: “with these many examples of this nature before us, it may not be deemed presumptuous to assert, these middle class of inhabitants in Bengal, afford the most cheering indication of any that exists at the present moment”. (*Bengal Herald*, 13 June 1829).

But though Rammohan was for moderation in political matters, he never submitted to derogatory fiats of the rulers and fought valiantly against any encroachment on human rights. His fight for the Freedom of the Press is well known. The conviction was deeply imbedded in his mind that a free Press is one of the best safeguards of liberty. He along with five of his friends submitted a petition against the press regulations to the Supreme Court and failing to get redress he presented through his lawyers a petition to the King in Council. This remarkable defence of a free Press has been rightly regarded as the *Arcopagitica* of Indian History. Failing to get the rule and ordinance repealed, Rammohan considered it derogatory to his honour to abide by them and stopped the publication of his paper *Mirat-ul-Ukhbar* as a protest. He declared that however anxious he was to impart knowledge and instructions to his brethern, he could not

proceed under the degrading terms imposed by Mr. Adam's regulations.

A whole series of newspapers that were published under the direction of Rammohan Roy (viz. *Sambad Kaumudi*, *Mirat-ul-Ukhbar*, *Bangadoot* and the *Reformer*) had for their object the rendering of public good. The prospectus of the *Sambad Kaumudi* thus declared that in this paper the subjects to be discussed "will have the object of public good as the guiding star." Rammohan was also the harbinger of a new way in the realm of journalism. He caused his journals to be published in English, Bengali and Hindi. He embarked on this multi-lingual venture in order to reach the masses of the whole of India.

Rammohan was perhaps the first educated Indian to cross the seas, a very brave and revolutionary social reform considering the custom of his time. His evidence before the parliamentary committee about judicial and economic matters are masterly expositions of India's rightful demands for reform.

It is impossible to enumerate each and every activity of the Raja in the multifarious branches of human undertakings. Let me finish this short review by quoting Max Muller's tribute to this great man. "Rammohan Roy was a truly great man, a man who did a truly great work, and whose name, if it is right to prophesy, will be remembered for ever as one of the great benefactors of mankind. The German name for prince is Furst, in English first, he who is always to the fore, he who courts the place of danger, the first place in fight, the last in flight. Such a furst was Rammohan Roy, a true prince, a real Rajah, if Rajah also like Rex means originally the steersman, the man at the Helm".



### 3

## DEROZIO AND YOUNG BENGAL

*Susobhan Chandra Sarkar*

The thought of Young Bengal (Pearychand Mitra, one of the circle, called it in 1877 'Young Calcutta') flowed through the fourth decade of the 19th century, arising in the late twenties and ebbing away after the mid-forties. Its inspirer was Derozio (1809-31), competent scholar, gifted writer, radical thinker, and the most famous of our teachers in the new education. It will be unusual to link with Young Bengal a second name, that of David Hare (1775-1841) who seems so different from Derozio in so many ways. Hare was indeed no professional instructor or intellectual, no man of letters or of academic learning. He had neither the brilliance nor the waywardness of his contemporary; unlike him he had become in diet and habits almost a half-Hindu. Yet between the two may be detected an underlying resemblance which furnishes a key to a proper estimation of Young Bengal.

Common to both was the passionate conviction that for India nothing was more essential than "a dissemination of European learning and science among her people". Both encouraged freedom of thinking and discussion and inspired a courage and personal integrity in their followers "to throw off the fetters of that antiquated bigotry which still clung to their countrymen". And unlike other leaders around them, both were 'godless' secularists with little faith in denominations or religious instruction, and yet staunch idealists.

Nor can one forget that in the hour of trial Hare tried to stand by Derozio and his maligned pupils about whom he declared—"your countrymen look upon you as their reformers and instructors"; while the Derozians were the first to honour Hare publicly, and after his death they were in the forefront in the endeavour to perpetuate his memory, in the unique First of June anniversaries for 25 years without a break.

## 2

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was a Calcutta Eurasian of Portuguese-Indian ancestry, the son of an officer in an English mercantile firm. (In the Hindu College Records of 1831, the name is occasionally spelt as De Rozio; Max Muller wrote D.Rozario). He was educated in one of the pioneer English-teaching private schools of the early 19th century, run by the Scotsman Drummond in the Dharmatala area. Drummond was a scholar-poet, and as a notorious free-thinker an exile from his native land. It may safely be conjectured that Derozio derived from Drummond his taste in literature and philosophy, his love of Burns, his faith in the French Revolution and English Radicalism.

After finishing school and a short spell of clerkship in his father's office, young Derozio stayed for some time at Bhagalpur at the house of his aunt, a Mrs. Wilson. Here he blossomed out as a writer, contributing to the *India Gazette*, composing poems (including the *Fakir of Jhungeera*, inspired by local legends). He wrote patriotic verse, unusual in one from his community, earlier than Kasiprasad Ghosh:

My country! in thy days of glory past  
A beauteous halo circled round thy brow,  
And worshipped as a deity thou wast,  
Where is that glory, where that reverence now?

Derozio's youthful critique on Kant was considered as something which "would not disgrace even gifted philoso-

phers"; his translation of a French essay on Moral Philosophy was printed posthumously. The fame already won secured him an appointment as teacher to the senior classes in the Hindu College before he had ended his 'teens', early in 1828 (1827 according to Kisorichand Mitra, 1826 according to some). Back in Calcutta, Derozio is said to have edited the *Hesperus* and the *Calcutta Literary Gazette*; to have acted as editor-assistant to the *India Gazette*, "ultra-radical in its politics"; and to have written for the *Calcutta Magazine*, the *Indian Magazine*, the *Bengal Annual*, the *Kaleidoscope*. One of his poems greeted the liberation of Greece at the battle of Navarino; another hailed the legislative prohibition of widow-burning in India.

Derozio's personality brought "a new era in the annals of the College", the youthful teacher drawing the senior boys "like a magnet" round him. According to his biographer "neither before, nor since his day has any teacher, within the walls of any native educational establishment in India, ever exercised such an influence over his pupils". Not alone in the classrooms, but outside the hours as well, he strove with success "to broaden and deepen the knowledge of his pupils" in Western thought and literature, the new fountain which emancipated and intoxicated. The College students clustered round him and very many of them carried down to their last days the deep impress stamped on them by their Master. This was the cementing link which held together the Young Bengal group, the memory which made a close-knit fellowship of affection and friendship even in later life. Derozio's own approach to the bright young men round him has been preserved in his lines still fondly recalled by his College:

Expanding like the petals of young flowers  
I watch the gentle opening of your minds  
And the sweet loosening of the spell that binds  
Your intellectual energies and powers.

What joyance rains upon me when I see  
Fame in the mirror of futurity  
Weaving the chaplets you have yet to gain,  
And then I feel I have not lived in vain.

Unlike most teachers, Derozio encouraged his students to debate freely and question authority. He urged them to think for themselves, "to be in no way influenced by any of the idols mentioned by Bacon—to live and die for truth". One of his pupils, Radhanath Sikdar, said of him: "he has been the cause and the sole cause of that spirit of enquiry after truth, and that contempt of vice—which cannot but be beneficial to India". Another, Ramgopal Ghosh, held up the motto: "He who will not reason is a bigot; he who cannot is a fool, and he who does not is a slave".

Derozio's favourite pupils had a free run of his house in the Entally quarter of the city, and some of them indulged in forbidden food and drink. The tinge of youthful bravado in this should not make us forget the evident sincerity and courage which marked the revolt against tradition in practice, though one may regret that, unlike the young Brahmo rebels of a later generation, some at least of Young Bengal aggressively offended the susceptibility of neighbours by a parade of unkind derision. Hindu society was scandalised beyond measure, understandably, though without any real understanding. The assertion of Madhabchandra Mallik in a College magazine—"if there is anything that we hate from the bottom of our heart, it is Hinduism"—was a defiant ebullition of immature irreverence. But the refusal of another student, Rasik-krishna Mallik, in open court to swear by the holy water—"I do not believe in the sacredness of the Ganges"—was a mark of heroic integrity. The addiction to drink in so many Derozians was a touch of weakness. Yet one cannot forget the contemporary testimony of Haramohan Chattopadhyay of the College office: "they were all considered men of *truth*. Indeed, the *College boy* was a synonym for truth".

Derozio and his pupils started in 1828 the Academic Association, our first debating club, which discussed topics like freewill and fate, virtue and vice, patriotism, arguments for or against the existence of God, the shames of idolatry and priestcraft. The long weekly meetings were presided over by Derozio whose exhortations were cherished, while the debating talents of the youthful members attracted attention and drew many celebrities in the city to the exciting sessions. The Hindu College boys started the *Parthenon* magazine (the *Athenium*, according to Sibnath Sastri) on 15 February 1830 wherein were mooted subjects like women's education, necessity of cheap justice, and the curse of superstition. This organ of the "Hindu by birth, yet European by education" was suppressed after two issues by order of the College Visitor, Dr. H. H. Wilson. By arrangement with David Hare, Derozio delivered a course of lectures on metaphysics in his school "attended by some four hundred young men", many of whom were delving deep in the new thought of Bacon, Locke, Hume, Smith, Paine or Bentham.

In this atmosphere there was surging up a wave of radical sentiment. In the *India Gazette* of 12 February 1830, a Hindu College student argued against the current colonization scheme by an array of historical precedents from ancient to modern times. On 10 December 1830, 200 persons attended the July Revolution celebration in the Town Hall. On Christmas Day of the same year the tricolour flag of the French revolution was hoisted on the Monument, apparently by unknown people.

Orthodox society was deeply alarmed. It was rumoured that some Hindu College boys, when required to utter *mantras* at prayers, would repeat lines from the *Iliad* instead; that one student, asked to bow down before the goddess *Kali*, greeted the image with a 'good morning, madam'. A poor Brahmin named Brindaban Ghoshal carried to society leaders the daily gossip, spiced richly with scandal-mongering about Derozio and his pupils. Newspapers like the

*Sambad Prabhakār* and the *Samachar Chandrikā* raised a hue and cry about religion in danger from the "atheist beasts" who aped the "vagabond Firingis". In April 1831 the former printed a letter, "reflecting in very unbecoming language upon the character of the teachers of Hindoo College", against which the College Committee was constrained to remonstrate. Clearly, the provocation was not entirely on the side of the Derozians.

Even before the newspaper campaign took shape, the Managing Committee of the Hindu College had become restive. On 5 February 1831, the Committee had indeed patched up a quarrel between Derozio and the Head Master D'Anselme; when Derozio went with a progress report to D'Anselme, the latter had "lifted his hand to strike Derozio" and when David Hare intervened, D'Anselme had called Hare "a vile sycophant". Evidently the head master had been badly rattled by the storm which had arisen round his subordinate. The incident ended with the usual expression of mutual regrets. The Committee however (according to Pearychand Mitra) soon proceeded to pass resolutions "to check as far as possible all disquisitions tending to unsettle the belief of the boys in the great principles of national religion", condemning "practices inconsistent with the Hindu notions of propriety", and prohibiting "the habit of attending societies at which political and religious discussions are held". Finally, Committee-member Ramkamal Sen took the initiative in calling a special meeting for the removal of Derozio.

The Calcutta Presidency College (into which the old Hindu College was transformed in 1855) still preserves a volume of manuscript records containing the proceedings of the "Special Meeting of the Directors of the Hindoo College" on 23 April 1831. A memorandum was considered proposing among other things that "Mr. Derozio being the root of all evils and the cause of Public alarm, should be discharged from the College"; that "All those students who are publicly hostile to Hinduism and the established custom of the Country....

.....should be turned out”; that “if any of the boys go to see or attend public lectures, to be dismissed”; that “Books to be read and time for each study to be fixed”. It was urged that Derozio’s misconduct was causing the withdrawal of students from the College, though we find from the proceedings of 7 May and 11 June 1831 that withdrawals continued even after Derozio’s dismissal.

The Committee by a majority of 6 to 3 refused to pronounce Derozio “an improper person to be intrusted with the education of youth” but decided nevertheless to dismiss him “in the present state of public feeling amongst the Hindoo Community.” Wilson and Hare abstained on the second vote as they could not speak for that community. Radhakanta Deb, Ramkamal Sen, Radhamadhab Bando-padhyay, and the governor Chandrakumar Tagore held the dismissal to be ‘necessary’; Prasannakumar Tagore and Rasamoy Datta thought that it was only ‘expedient’; Srikishan Sinha alone maintained that it was ‘unnecessary’. No action was taken however against the students.

On Wilson’s suggestion, Derozio sent in on 25 April a resignation letter in which he commented: “unexamined, and unheard, you resolve to dismiss me without even the mockery of a trial”. In reply to Wilson’s queries about the “rumoured charges” against him, Derozio sent his explanation on 26 April. His answer to the question whether he had undermined his pupils’ faith in God is deservedly famous in the annals of the Bengal Renaissance:

If it be wrong to speak at all upon such a subject, I am guilty; for I am neither afraid nor ashamed to confess having stated the doubts of philosophers upon this head, because I have also stated the solution of those doubts. Is it forbidden anywhere to argue upon such a question? If so it must be equally wrong to adduce an argument upon either side, or is it consistent with an enlightened notion of truth to wed ourselves to only one

view of so important a subject, resolving to close our eyes and ears against all impressions that oppose themselves to it?

.....Entrusted as I was for some time with the education of youth, peculiarly circumstanced, was it for me to have made them pert and ignorant dogmatists? .....I therefore thought it my duty to acquaint several of the College students with the substance of Hume's celebrated dialogue between Cleanthes and Philo, in which the most subtle and refined arguments against theism are adduced. But I have also furnished them with Dr. Reid's and Dugald Stewart's more acute replies to Hume, replies which to this day continue unrefuted. This is the head and front of my offending.....

.....That I should be called a sceptic and infidel is not surprising, as these names are always given to persons who think for themselves in religion

Derozio was forced to leave the College but the spell he had cast on the youth persisted. Krishnamohan Bando-padhyay, who was expelled from home in August 1831 for the escapades of some of his young friends, brought out an organ, the *Inquirer*, and wrote the *Persecuted* to expose the practical heterodoxy of the orthodox. Rasik-krishna Mallik, who was once drugged and bound to be carried off by relations to some safe distant place but managed to escape and run away from his father's house, arranged for a second organ, the *Jnananveshan*; the College Committee proceedings of 11 June 1831 has an item—"Letter from Rossic Kisto Mullic proposing to publish a newspaper and applying for subscription" which was granted.

Derozio himself remained active and established a daily, the *East Indian*. It is pleasant to find him an idealist to the last and as uncompromising as ever—he was preaching amity between the Anglo-Indian community and other



Indians and attacked in his paper the celebration of the *Durga Puja* by Prasannakumar Tagore who called himself the follower of the theistic Rammohan.

On 17 December 1831 Derozio was stricken down with cholera. His favourite disciples rushed to his bedside and battled with death for a week. It came on Christmas Eve and the stormy petrel of our Renaissance had sunk to its rest.

### 3

Worldly occupations and private interests inevitably scattered in course of time the individual members of the Derozian group, for Young Bengal could never develop into a movement comparable to the various trends in Europe to which the same adjective has been attached. Yet for at least a dozen years after Derozio's untimely tragic death, his impact continued to be manifested in a collective way.

Radical sentiments continued to find expression every now and then. In 1832 it was reported that the Hindu College students were offering as much as Rs. 8 for a copy of Tom Paine's *Age of Reason* and that one publisher had sold 100 copies at Rs. 5 each. In 1836 the *Englishman* noted that the Hindu College students "are all radicals, and the followers of Benthamite principles. The very word Tory is a sort of ignominy among them.....they all belong to the school of Adam Smith." In 1843 an 'Old Hindu', who was "engaged in heavy commercial duties", pined for revolution in a series of essays on Indian grievances.

More specific political thinking by the Derozians was also not wanting. Rasik-krishna Mallik in 1833 criticised police corruption, pointed out the unprotected status of the peasantry under the Permanent Settlement, and advocated the abolition of the political power of the merchant Company; in 1834-35 he delivered impressive public orations on the revision of the Company's Charter and the freedom of

the Press. Tarachand Chakrabarti pleaded in 1842 for a State system of technical education as in Orleanist France. In 1842, Ramgopal Ghosh in company with the visiting orator George Thompson of anti-slavery fame was 'thundering' in the hall of the Faujdari Balakhana; in 1847 his public speaking earned him the epithet of the 'Indian Demosthenes'; his *Remarks* defended against European outcry the so-called 'Black Bills' of 1849 which had tried to abolish the judicial immunities of Europeans in India from the ordinary law. Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay, in a famous essay on 'Judicature and Police' in 1843, described the existing system as one of "extortion and corruption" and incidentally attributed the overthrow of our original equality to the "ambitious and domineering priesthood". Pearychand Mitra in 1846 pleaded for the protection of the *ryot* and rose to the level of theory when he maintained that "it is private property which gives rise to government, and not government to private property" (echoing Locke's thought introduced by Derozio) and that "the opulent and powerful do not require so much of its constant care and anxiety as the poor and helpless".

The Hindu College men ran several periodicals to serve as platforms. In the last year of Derozio's life, Krishnamohan Bandopadhyay inaugurated the *Inquirer* to fight Hindu obscurantism and Rasik-krishna Mallik began to organise the *Jnananveshan*, a bilingual journal which lasted till 1844 with the avowed object of instruction in the "science of government and jurisprudence". About 1838, the *Hindu Pioneer* carried an article on 'India and Foreigners' which complained of the people's exclusion from any share in government or office of trust and of the unjustifiable "enormous taxation". Tarachand Chakrabarti conducted a journal called the *Quill* which freely criticised governmental policies. In April 1842 was started the *Bengal Spectator* which began to agitate for competitive civil service examinations and in which in 1843 Radhanath Sikdar unfolded the story of his struggle against government officials to prevent

the exaction of forced labour from the Survey of India 'coolies'. It also supported widow-marriage in principle.

The Derozian penchant for Societies was continuing. The pioneer body, the Academic Association, was kept alive till about 1839. David Hare accepted the presidentship after Derozio; when a meeting ended he would often stroll in the streets, still talking with the members. It was supplemented by an Epistolary Association in which the Derozians exchanged opinions in the true Renaissance Humanist style. Ramgopal Ghosh and Radhanath Sikdar recorded experiences and reflections in the form of Diaries, and the former's house was a regular headquarters for the circle of friends. On 20 February 1838 was launched the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge with the Derozians at the helm (president—Tarachand Chakrabarti; vice-president—Ramgopal Ghosh; secretaries—Pearychand Mitra and Ramtanu Lahiri). The Society which began to function on 12 March 1838 elected David Hare as Honorary Visitor. It published three volumes of papers read between 1840 and 1843 and including the 'Nature of Historical Studies' and 'Civil and Social Reform' (Krishnamohan); 'Interests of the Female Sex' and the 'State of Hindustan' in five parts (Pearychand); 'Sketch of Bankura' (Harachandra Ghosh); 'Notice of Tipperah', a 'new Spelling Book', and 'Notices of Chittagong' in four parts (Gobindachandra Basak). It was a meeting of this Society in the Hindu College Hall on 8 February 1843 that Principal Richardson tried to disperse as seditious, when the president Tarachand Chakrabarti sharply called him to order with a famous reproof. Early in 1839 was started a shortlived Mechanical Institute. In 1844 Kisorichand Mitra founded the Hindu Theophilanthropic Society (an echo of Volney, perhaps).

The Derozian societies were cultural associations but they were being drawn towards politics. George Thompson had urged the Bengalis to "abhor expediency" and organise

themselves into political associations, more efficacious than even the Press. His meetings had aroused the enthusiasm of the men of Young Bengal who about this time were popularly called the 'Chakrabarti Faction' after their senior-most associate, Tarachand. On 20 April 1843 was founded the Bengal British India Society, the "aristocracy of intelligence" as distinct from the "aristocracy of wealth" already organised in the Landholders' Association. The Society was merged in the British Indian Association (when it was founded on 31 October 1851)—the first united front of the politically-minded educated Indians. By that time Young Bengal as a distinct entity had faded out.

One strange episode recorded by Sibnath Sastri deserves a passing notice. Years afterwards he learned from Bombay friends of a Derozian *sannyasi* in Kathiawar who always praised his great teacher and once exposed the princely misrule in a series of letters to the press on 'Misgovernment at Kathiawad'. He was imprisoned for a year but had touched off an agitation which forced the ruler to release him and even to put him in charge of the administration with power to choose his own assistants. After a spell of reform however, reaction reasserted itself and the *sannyasi* was expelled from the scene of his activities. This unnamed Derozian has much to our regret remained unidentified.

## 4

David Hare had come out to India in 1800 and, after retiring from the watch-trade about 1816, devoted the remaining quarter-century of his life and all his energy, time, and fortune to the furtherance of the modern education and uplift of the people of his adopted country. He was the virtual founder of the Hindu College of 1817 and the organiser of the School Book Society (1817) and the School Society (1818). He nursed the Hindu College through all its early trials, sent up to it the cream of his own school boys, and watched over it as a daily visitor. Late in life he

helped to make possible the momentous experiment of our first Medical College (1835), disarming the popular prejudice against dissection through his wide contacts with and persuasive influence over Indian society.

In the thirties, Hare addressed Town Hall meetings as an ally of Young Bengal: against the Press Regulations (on 5 January 1835); for the extension of the Jury System (on 8 July 1835); against the 'export of coolies' to Mauritius (10 July 1838). He personally rescued about a hundred such 'coolies' "kept in durance" in a house in the Pataldanga area.

The Derozians publicly honoured Hare at a reception at Madhabchandra Mallik's Jorasanko house as early as 1830 or 1831 when he was hailed as the "morning star" and his travelling *palanquin* was described as "a regular dispensary" for the needy. He was indeed the benefactor, guide, and friend of an entire generation.

David Hare died on 1 June 1841, ten years after Derozio and of the same fell disease. His "inveterate hostility to the Gospel", as the *Friend of India* put it, made it necessary to bury him in his own ground in College Square. On a very wet day with cyclonic weather, 5,000 Indians followed his hearse from his residence in what is now Hare Steet to the grave. His statue, erected by Derozian initiative, which now stands on the lawn of the Presidency College, is surely the one monument to a foreigner in the city which even the most fanatic of nationalists would not dream of removing.

## 5

Biographical sketches of the individual representatives of Young Bengal would take too long a space, but a standard list of the inner circle may be taken from the *Life of David Hare* with their approximate available dates added: Rasikkrishna Mallik (1810-58), Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay (1812-87), Krishnamohan Bandopadhyay (1813-85), and Ramgopal Ghosh (1815-68)—the four 'fire-brands' as they

were called in their College days; Harachandra Ghosh (1808-68), Sibchandra Deb (1811-90), Ramtanu Lahiri (1813-98), Radhanath Sikdar (1813-70), and Pearychand Mitra (1814-83)—only less famous than the first group; Madhabchandra Mallik, Maheschandra Ghosh, Gobindra-chandra Basak and Amritlal Mitra. To these may be added an elder associate, Tarachand Chakrabarti (1804-55), and a younger, Kisorichand Mitra. All these are famous names in the history of 19th century Bengal. There must have been many more who had come under the magic spell of a teacher who died when barely twentythree.

The Derozians were vilified in their early life when passion ran high; while their individual merits were later admitted, it has become almost a tradition to belittle Young Bengal as a trend. Rajnarayan Basu's comment in 1875 that "the light from the West had turned their heads" is the representative common judgment. It may however be contended that the favourite verdict is a distorted one, though of course a historical valuation inevitably implies a point of view.

Contemporaries were shocked mostly by the indulgence in the socially forbidden food and drink, in the "cutting their way through ham and beef and wading to liberalism through tumblers of beer". But this was mainly the means of asserting the right of individual judgment in matters of established custom, not unusual at a critical point of development. Unorthodoxy of this kind may indeed be preferable to the hypocrisy which often pervades a settled orthodox social norm.

The charge of extreme Anglicism has also been overstressed. Besides the historical excuse of the sudden confrontation with the unexpected wealth of advanced Western thought, there remains the evidence that the Derozians did not forsake their country or people in the fashion common to so many later 'Anglicised' Indians. From Derozio downwards, patriotism stirred Young Bengal minds; Krishna-

mohan, even as a Christian missionary since 1837, studied Hindu philosophy and *sastric* literature; Tarachand translated Manu; the *Jnananveshan* was conducted partly in Bengali; Ramgopal hailed the Bengali prose of the *Tatva-bodhini Patrika*; Pearychand and Radhanath, two intimate friends, brought out the *Masik Patrika*, a monthly magazine in simple colloquial Bengali, understandable to ordinary literate housewives; finally, Pearychand (Tekchand Thakur) was a not unimportant contributor to our literature in both the popular and learned styles.

The accusation of irreligion, again, is not entirely correct; the Derozian aim was in truth "to summon Hinduism to the bar of their reason". As early as 1832, Maheschandra and Krishnamohan turned Christians; Sibchandra in later life became the president of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj and Ramtanu was drawn close to the same faith. The Derozian criticism of early Brahmoism was not pointless: Krishnamohan's comment that it came "as far as half the way in religion and politics"; Ramgopal's charge that its anti-conversion campaign had a tinge of hypocrisy; Ramtanu's penetrating remark—"The followers of Vedanta temporize. . . . . I know that the subversion of idolatry is a consummation devoutly to be wished for, but I do not desire it by employing wrong means. . . . . there is a spirit of hostility entertained by the Society against Christianity which is not creditable. . . . . Let the votaries of all religions appeal to the reason of their fellow-creatures". Nor can one forget the personal integrity shown by so many Derozians—the impressive honesty in official life of Harachandra and Rasik-krishna; the life of service to neighbours of Sibchandra; the refusal of Ramgopal to abjure his beliefs in spite of the threat of social ostracism; Radhanath's decision, in the teeth of family opposition, not to marry a minor wife; saintly Ramtanu's heroic renunciation (as early as 1851) of the 'sacred thread'.

Many of Young Bengal's true limitations were not peculiarly its own but shared by our entire Renaissance. The

educated community of the 19th century failed to understand the exploiting character of the alien British rule in India, looking mainly at its immediate benefits; the protagonists of our 'awakening' had little contact with or understanding of the toiling masses who lived in a world apart; the obsession with Hindu traditions and life kept at a distance the community of our Muslim fellow-citizens. Such aspects of our Renaissance heritage have seriously handicapped the democratic progress of the country.

The real failure of the Young Bengal trend, inevitable perhaps in the circumstances, was the failure to build up a sustained movement and developing ideology. Its most memorable positive aspects are a fearless rationalism and a candid appreciation of the regenerating new thought from the West. Much of this was drowned in the current of traditionalism, mysticism, religiosity, and revivalism fashionable in the latter part of the century. It is permissible to doubt whether the change has been a gain in our national life.

In the light of such reflections, one can at least look with a certain sympathy to the challenge of Kishorichand Mitra in 1861: "The youthful band of reformers who had been educated at the Hindoo College, like the tops of the Khanchangunga, were the first to catch and reflect the dawn. . . . . When has an opposition to popular prejudices, been dissociated with difficulty and trouble? . . . . . To excommunication and its concomitant evils, our friends were subjected. . . . . Conformity to the idolatrous practices and customs evince a weak desertion of principle. Non-conformity to them on the other hand is a moral obligation which we owe to our consciences."

#### NOTE

To economise space it has been necessary to omit constant references to the main authorities : the Hindu College Records of 1831 ; the sketches of its history by Kisorichand Mitra (1861) and Rajnarayan Bose (1875) - the latter in the useful annotated edition by Sri Debipada Bhattacharya ; the standard biographies of Derozio, Hare and Ramtanu Lahiri by Edwardes, Pearychand Mitra, and



Sibnath Sastri ; *Sambadpatre Sekaler Katha* by Brajendranath Banerjee and the very valuable study of contemporary journals in Dr. B. B. Majumdar's *Political Thought*. Acknowledgement is also due to *Banglar Jagaran* by Kazi Abdul Wadud and to *Notes on the Bengal Renaissance* by Amit Sen.

## 4

### MAHARSHI DEBENDRANATH TAGORE AND THE TATTVABODHINI SABHA

(1839-1859)

*Dilip Kumar Biswas*

In the history of the Bengal Renaissance the first three decades of the nineteenth century were of remarkable importance. It was about 1813 that Raja Rammohan Roy finally settled down in Calcutta and initiated his far-reaching schemes of religious and social reform with the support of a handful of trusted friends and admirers. At the same time the foundation of the Hindu College in Calcutta in 1817 threw open the floodgate of English education in Bengal, an event which the middle class youth was eagerly awaiting. The said institution very soon became the major centre (not of course the only one) for the spread of the progressive philosophical and social thought of the West and within a few years of its inception succeeded in building up a tradition of its own. It should not be imagined (as is sometimes done) that Rammohan with his associates and the Hindu College radicals represent two entirely different traditions. David Hare was the intimate friend of the Raja and Baidyanath Mukherjee was a member of his *Atmiya Sabha*. Rammohan himself was selfless enough to stand aside when the managing committee of the Hindu College came to be formed so that a laudable move might not be thwarted

due to his 'apostacy.' It can be shown that many young men belonging to the radical Young Bengal group were genuine admirers of the Raja and his ideals and a few actually his associates in the formation of the Brahmo Samaj. But generally the spheres of activity of the two sections were different.

After the departure of Rammohan for England the central body of the Brahmo Samaj gradually reached a moribund condition though its name, theology and social ideals continued to live among certain groups in and near Calcutta. The radicals were still a disjointed lot and their activities at this time seem to have consisted mainly of holding debates and discussions through a number of small associations more or less of the nature of study-circles. The foundations of a fresh culture-pattern for the future had already been laid by the genius of Rammohan. But the new ideology was still struggling to find a suitable expression. The need of the hour was a strong central organization under the leadership of a towering personality that would be able to weld all the scattered forces of progress in the country together, inspire them by certain common ideals and set them on the right track with the deliberate purpose of achieving a common goal. The *Tattvabodhini Sabha* established in Calcutta in 1839 under the inspiring leadership of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore can be said to have removed this want.

The *Sabha* was established by Debendranath Tagore, the eldest son of Dwarkanath Tagore, an intimate friend and associate of Rammohan Roy, on 6 October 1839. The venue was the famous Calcutta residence of the Tagores at Jorasanko which remained the headquarters of the organization throughout the period of its existence. The immediate cause of its origin is one of those wonderful accidents which impart to history some of its romantic charm. From his early youth Debendranath had been a seeker of spiritual truth. His deeply sensitive nature however could not at first find any

convincing answers to its fundamental enquiries in some of the Indian *Sastras* or in European philosophy. The result was a period of almost intolerable spiritual agony and unrest which he graphically describes in his *Autobiography*. While passing through this "dark night of the soul" he happened one day to pick up a flying leaf of the *Ishopanishad* edited by Raja Rammohan Roy. A perusal of the torn page brought him the long-sought solace. Afterwards an acquaintance with the Upanishads destroyed his already shaken belief in popular Hinduism. He eagerly took to Rammohan's monotheistic faith and started the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* primarily to preach it.

The organization began its career with ten members but it rapidly grew in strength and very soon the number exceeded eight hundred, a surprising figure for those days. The declared objective of the *Sabha* was the "extensive propagation of *Brahmo Dharma*". Its relations with the infant Brahmo Samaj were extremely close from the very beginning of its career. In fact the *Sabha* was the organisational wing of the Brahmo Samaj. In course of time the link grew closer till in 1859 the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* ceased to exist independently and was merged into the Calcutta Brahmo Samaj. Its life span, therefore, was not long.

The following brief list of some of the members of the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* in different times would convince anybody of the cosmopolitan character of the organization: (1) Pandit Ramchandra Vidyavagis, (2) Pandit Iswar-chandra Vidyasagar, (3) Debendranath Tagore, (4) Akshoy-kumar Datta, (5) Rajendralal Mitra, (6) Rajnarayan Bose, (7) Ramtanu Lahiri, (8) Ramgopal Ghosh, (9) Iswar-chandra Gupta, (10) Nabagopal Mitra, (11) Chandrasekhar Deb, (12) Tarachand Chakravarti, (13) Pyarichand Mitra (Tekchand Thakur), (14) Kishorichand Mitra, (15) Ramaprasad Roy, (16) Radhaprasad Roy, (17) Rajaram Roy, (18) Kasiprasad Ghosh, (19) Prasannakumar Sarbadhikari, (20) Madanmohan Tarkalankar, (21) Kaliprasanna Sinha,

(22) Sambhunath Pandit, (23) Digambar Mitra, (24) Bhola-nath Chandra, (25) Ramchandra Mitra, (26) Amritalal Mitra, (27) Pyarimohan Bose, (28) Rajkrishna Banerjee, (29) Anandachandra Vedantavagis, (30) Rakhaladas Halder, (31) Raja Satyasaran Ghoshal, (32) Raja Satyacharan Ghoshal, (33) Joygopal Mallick, (34) Chandranath Chatterjee, (35) Raja Narendrakrishna Bahadur, (36) Kasisvar Mitra, (37) Gopalchandra Chandra, (38) Ramanath Tagore, (39) Ramnarayan Vidyaratna, (40) Vanesvar Vidyalkar.

The list is far from being exhaustive, yet a glance at it is enough to convince us that the *Sabha* had truly become a common platform for the elite of mid-nineteenth century Bengal. Religious and social reformers, literary men, orientalists, freethinkers, educationists, journalists, all had united together for the first time with a common ideal and a programme. With the formation of the *Tattvabodhini Sabha*, Rammohan Roy's religious and social views emerge in the life of the nation not in the form of a sectarian creed but as the embodiment of all-round progress. What is remarkable is that the *Sabha* had formally bridged the gulf that separated the followers of Rammohan Roy and the Hindu College radicals. Many of the latter group, as the list of members indicates, had joined it thereby accepting its ideals. The unification of all these diverse elements of the national life under the banner of the *Sabha* was certainly a great organizational achievement which reflects credit on the tact, foresight and earnestness of the young Debendranath.

The *Tattvabodhini* phase is a significant chapter in the history of the Brahmo movement in India. The departure of Rammohan Roy for England and his premature death had deprived him of the chance of providing the infant Brahmo Samaj with a solid organizational machinery. Most of his associates had severed all connections with his church after his death for fear of social persecution. The task was now taken up with earnestness and enthusiasm. We notice a rapid growth of the power and influence of the Brahmo movement

after the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* had taken charge of the Brahmo Samaj. Rituals and ceremonials of the new church were drawn up, the most prominent among these being the system of initiation and the form of divine service. In 1843 Pandit Ramchandra Vidyavagis, the first *acharya* of the Samaj, formally initiated twenty-one youngmen including Debendranath Tagore and Akshoykumar Datta into Brahmoism. The initiated Brahmo was a new phenomenon in the history of the faith.

A notable doctrinal change that took place in the Brahmo Samaj during this epoch was the abandonment of the belief in the infallibility of the Vedas. Rationalists like Akshoykumar Datta within the fold of the Samaj found themselves unable any longer to believe in any *apauresheya sastra* (revealed scripture) and ultimately Debendranath also was convinced of the truth of this standpoint. It was formally decided that the basis of Brahmoism would henceforth be "the human heart illumined by spiritual knowledge born of self-realisation", and not any infallible scripture. The Hindu scriptures however continued to be respected and Debendranath compiled in two volumes the *Brahmo Dharma*, a selection from the Hindu *Sastras*, and wrote the *Brahmo Dharma Vija* (The Essence of Brahmoism) for the general spiritual guidance of the Brahmos.

The Brahmo movement spread rapidly in the country and by 1872 the church had succeeded in establishing altogether one hundred and one branches throughout India and Burma. This impetus to organizational work was a contribution of the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* and its founder. It should be mentioned in passing that the Brahmo leaders of this epoch including Debendranath regarded the monotheism of the Brahmo Samaj as the best and noblest phase in the development of Hinduism. Without denying the universal outlook of Brahmoism they were always eager to emphasize its special relations with Hinduism. The abolition of idolatry and superstitions according to them was a step towards the

purification of the traditional faith. Later on, the Brahmo Samaj drifted away from this position due to the influence of Brahmananda Keshabchandra Sen and his followers.

The classical past of India was a source of inspiration to the Indian renaissance movement. Accordingly, various attempts were made throughout the nineteenth century for its discovery and reconstruction. The foundation of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta in 1784 was a landmark in the history of oriental studies in this country. It can be said that the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* was the pioneer body to introduce a systematic study of India's past history and culture in the Bengali language. Its efforts in this field differed from those of the occidental scholars in so far as it wanted to develop in the people an awareness of the glories of their national heritage. Indirectly therefore this stimulated the growth of nationalism among the educated Bengalees.

The Bengali translations of Rigveda by Debendranath and the Mahabharata by Iswarchandra Vidyasagar in the pages of the *Tattvabodhini Patrika* deserve special mention in this respect. Both these works remained incomplete but the lines laid down were subsequently taken up by two other illustrious Bengalees, Rameshchandra Datta and Kaliprasanna Sinha, who published complete translations of these two texts. Akshoykumar Datta wrote a series of articles in Bengali in the same journal on the religious sects of India and the commercial and maritime activities of the ancient Hindus, both of which were later published as books entitled *Bharatvarshiya Upasak Sampraday* and *Prachin Hindudiger Samudra Jatra O Vanijya-Vivaran* respectively. The first is modelled on (though it is not an exact translation of) Wilson's *Religious Sects of the Hindus*. Akshoykumar often adds new materials and criticises and corrects the errors of Wilson. The second is an original and pioneer work of research published at a time when the subject was very little known to the western and eastern scholars. A perusal of the contemporary files of the *Tattvabodhini*

*Patrika* (the mouthpiece of the *Sabha*) leads one sometimes to mistake it for a journal of oriental studies. Valuable and learned articles frequently appeared on such subjects as Hindu *Smritis*, the forests and rivers and mountains of ancient India, the antiquity and historicity of the Puranas, the spread of the Aryan civilization in India etc. A *grantha sabha* (like the committee of papers of the Asiatic Society), consisting of five members, received and scrutinized the articles before recommending them for publication in the *Patrika*. Men like Pandit Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Rajendralal Mitra, Rajnarayan Bose, Prasannakumar Sarbadhikari served as members of the publication committee in different times and Akshoykumar Datta was its secretary for a long period.

The *Tattvabodhini* age can be described as a memorable epoch in the history of the development of modern Bengali language and literature. Through its collective efforts the *Sabha* succeeded in generating a sense of respect in the minds of the English-educated Bengalees towards their own language. This was previously in a great measure lacking. Two incidents from the life of Debendranath stand out as illustrations of the great love he had for his mother tongue, *viz.*, his refusal to allow his cousin Jnanendramohan Tagore to address the meetings of the Brahmo Samaj in English and his non-acceptance of a letter written in English from one of his sons-in-law. A band of young Brahmos at this time pressed for the introduction of Bengali in the place of Sanskrit in the church-service of the Brahmo Samaj and in 1853 the Kidderpore Brahmo Samaj started conducting its divine service in Bengali.

The *Tattvabodhini Patrika* which outlived the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* came out in one of its later issues (*Asvin*, 1798 *saka*) with a bitter attack on those who would mix up English words and expressions with Bengali in their conversation and made an impassioned appeal for the maintenance of the purity of the mother tongue. The *Patrika* fur-



ther through its manifold discussions of various branches of human knowledge in Bengali succeeded in giving the language a shape and discipline which made it fit enough for all type of serious discussions. About it Rameshchandra Datta writes: "People all over Bengal awaited every issue with eagerness.....Discoveries of European science, moral instructions, accounts of different nations and tribes, of the animate and inanimate creation all that could enlighten the expanding intellect of Bengal and dispel darkness and prejudices found a convenient vehicle in the *Tattva bodhini Patrika*". The journal was edited in different times among others by Akshoykumar Datta and Iswar-chandra Vidyasagar. It strongly criticised the government for its indifference to the teaching of Bengali and the Hindu College for the neglect of Bengali in its curriculum.

For the teaching of science and theology through the medium of Bengali, the *Sabha* started a school named *Tattvabodhini Pathshala* in 1840 in Bansberia in the Hooghly district. Debendranath wrote a Sanskrit grammar and Akshoykumar Datta, text books on geography and physics in Bengali. Besides all these collective efforts mention must also be made of the great individual contributions of such literary giants of the age as Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Akshoykumar Datta, Debendranath Tagore, Pyarichand Mitra, Rajendralal Mitra, Iswarchandra Gupta and others to different branches of Bengali literature. The period from the appearance of the *Tattvabodhini Patrika* in 1843 to the birth of the *Bangadarsan* in 1872 has been rightly regarded as the *Tattvabodhini* age in the history of modern Bengali prose.

During the fourth and fifth decades of the nineteenth century, Debendranath Tagore and the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* assumed the leadership of the struggle that Hindu society had been waging against the onslaughts of the Christian missionaries since the days of Rammohan Roy. Rammohan's controversies with the missionaries were mainly doctrinal,

his chief adversaries being the leaders of the Serampur Baptist Mission. Debendranath had to encounter mainly the missionaries of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland led by Dr. Alexander Duff. The struggle in the *Tattvabodhini* epoch was waged both on the theoretical and organizational planes. Doctrinal squabbles were going on between the two sides as early as 1839 and 1840 and tracts, books and pamphlets were from time to time being published. The war, however, formally started with the publication of Dr. Duff's book *India and India Missions* which contained a hostile criticism of Indian culture and religion, particularly of the Vedanta philosophy, sometime in unrestrained language. Debendranath and the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* took up the challenge and a detailed criticism of Duff's book appeared in the *Tattvabodhini Patrika*. Henceforth incessant and violent controversies went on in the pages of contemporary journals belonging to both parties, the *Tattvabodhini Patrika* acting as the mouthpiece of the offended Hindu society. In 1845 the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* published the famous booklet *Vaidantic Doctrines Vindicated* in which the objections of the missionaries to the Vedanta philosophy were sought to be answered. Many have regarded Debendranath as its author. Whatever the authorship, the effect of the tract was tremendous. Voices were raised on all sides against the arguments of the missionaries in favour of Christianity and their denunciation of Hinduism. Even after the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* had been merged into the Brahmo Samaj, the latter body continued the struggle through its great leaders Keshabchandra Sen and Rajnarayan Bose. In 1863 Dr. Duff virtually admitted defeat and left India.

Apart from such theoretical controversies, Debendranath had also to enter into a bitter conflict with the missionaries over the practical issue of the conversion of minor Indians to Christianity. Calcutta was deeply agitated over the conversion of Umeshchandra Sarkar (14) and his wife (11) which took place in 1845. At

the direction of Debendranath, Akshoykumar wrote a forceful protest in the *Tattvabodhini Patrika*. Debendranath himself carried on a house to house propaganda and succeeded in uniting all sections of public opinion against the activities of the missionaries. The result was the foundation in Calcutta of the Hindu Charitable Institution which was a free school for middle-class Hindu boys, intended to keep them away from Christian influence. The movement soon spread to the mofussil areas and such institutions came to be established at Panihati, Krishnanagar and Apurvapur (in the Hooghly district). The credit for building up an anti-missionary movement on an all-party basis belongs mainly to Debendranath. The incidents of conversion of Indians to Christianity led however to a heart-searching on the part of Hindu society and the *Tattvabodhini Patrika* published an article enumerating the causes of such conversion. The article was subsequently published in the form of a pamphlet by the Bhowanipur Brahmo Samaj. All these efforts were successful. The educated youth began gradually to lose the fascination for Christianity and turned slowly towards his own traditional heritage.

As a spiritual disciple of Raja Rammohan Roy, Debendranath assented to the former's social philosophy and belief in social reform. He had succeeded in assembling on the platform of the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* almost all the socially progressive elements in the country. Pandit Ramchandra Vidyavagis, the first *acharya* of the Brahmo Samaj, had already publicly supported the re-marriage of Hindu widows even before Pandit Iswarchandra Vidyasagar. The Chakrabarti Faction, a section of the young radicals led by Tarachand Chakrabarti, the first secretary of the Brahmo Samaj, had also supported widow re-marriage in the pages of their mouthpiece the *Bengal Spectator*. Brahmo leaders like Debendranath Tagore, Akshoykumar Datta and Rajnarayan Bose were in favour of it. It was, therefore, no wonder that the great reformer Iswarchandra Vidyasagar found in the *Tattvabodhini Sabha*, where all these sections

had united, an extremely congenial atmosphere which gave him strength and inspiration in his attempts to introduce widow re-marriage in the country. Throughout the period of its existence the *Sabha* remained a strong supporter of his reform scheme. The *Tattvabodhini Patrika* published his writings on it, backed him editorially and enthusiastically flashed the reports of instances of widow re-marriage. After the extinction of the *Sabha*, the Brahmo Samaj remained one of the chief collaborators of Vidyasagar in this field. The *Sabha* further condemned social evils like polygamy, drew the attention of the thoughtful section of the community to evils of drunkenness and debauchery, and supported women's education through the medium of *Tattvabodhini Patrika*.

Further in 1854 was formed chiefly by those associated with the *Sabha* a new organization known as the *Samajon-nati-Vidhayini Suhrid-Samiti* (Association of Friends for the Improvement of Society). Its object was to promote progressive reforms like widow re-marriage, abolition of polygamy and superstition, amelioration of the condition of *ryots* etc. Debendranath Tagore was elected its president and Akshoykumar Datta and Kishorichand Mitra, secretaries. This body also helped considerably to advance the cause of social reform and progress in the middle of the nineteenth century. A study of the social activities of Debendranath and the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* shows that Rammohan Roy's mantle had fallen on worthy shoulders. So far social reform was concerned, Debendranath was however always in favour of proceeding cautiously so that the close link between the Brahmo Samaj and the larger Hindu public might never be unduly strained. In this he differed from Keshabchandra Sen and other subsequent leaders of the Brahmo Samaj.

Politics in the modern sense were unknown to the educated middle class of mid-nineteenth century Bengal. The chaos of the previous two centuries had practically destroyed the political unity of India. National cha-

racter had sunk very low and the impact of the West had made the traditional values and conventions seem inadequate for the task of building the India of the future. The new middle class therefore rightly thought that a long period of association with the civilization of the West would be necessary before India could regain her political independence. This was the attitude of Rammohan Roy and in fact of all the leading figures of our renaissance. Debendranath Tagore was no exception. The *Tattvabodhini Sabha* had no direct political activity. But it will be noticed that all its work in the religious, social and literary spheres was calculated to create a sense of national consciousness and patriotic self-respect in the minds of the educated people. While it rejected all forms of obscurantism, it focussed the attention of the middle class on the dignity of Indian culture and tradition. As a result this class began to turn slowly but steadily towards its national heritage. This movement is the beginning of our political and nationalist activities.

Besides being the main cause of this general change of outlook, the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* gained through its exertions two immediate and specific political results. It inspired the Hindu nationalism which we have come to associate with stalwarts like Rajnarayan Bose and Nabagopal Mitra, the organiser of the Hindu Mela. Further, by holding up the vision of united India it probably spurred into action existing political institutions like the Zamindary Association and the Bengal British India Society both of which were ultimately merged into the British Indian Association formed in 1851.

Debendranath Tagore, who had been one of the sponsors and the secretary of the Nationalist Association also established in the same year, became the first secretary of the British Indian Association. Almost the same set of men was active in the two fronts, cultural and political, under the same leadership. It is impossible to overlook the close link between these two wings of middle-class activity in mid-nineteenth

century Bengal. Through the British Indian Association, Debendranath contacted the leading citizens of Madras and Bombay and impressed upon them the urgent necessity of co-operation among the representative bodies of different regions in India so that India might present a united front in placing her demands before her British rulers. The remarkable petition and memorandum sent to the British Parliament by the British Indian Association in 1852, under the signature of Debendranath, made history by asking for this country a modified form of self-government and has been rightly regarded as "the first political document of constructive Statesmanship emanating from an Indian Public Body". The all-India outlook of the British Indian Association was an indirect outcome of the cultural ideology of the *Tattvabodhini Sabha*.

Like every other human institution the *Sabha* had its defects. It was exclusively a middle-class organization and had practically no contact with the masses. It made no attempt to consider the interests of the Muslim community and concerned itself with the Hindus alone. It kept itself and its activities confined mainly to the city of Calcutta, though of course the circumstances were mitigated to a certain extent by the rapid extension of the Brahmo Samaj movement. Its cultural programme grew somewhat stilted after a period for want of proper integration. All this is true. The fact however remains that the *Sabha* under the able and inspiring leadership of Debendranath had brought the desired unity of purpose in the renaissance movement, strengthened the religious and social ideas of Rammohan Roy, opened new pathways in literature, and vindicated our national self-respect by defending the traditional values against foreign attack. By its exertions it had successfully carried forward the best traditions of the age of Rammohan Roy and had made possible the succeeding age of Keshabchandra Sen and Sibnath Sastri, Bankimchandra Chatterjee and Swami Vivekananda, Surendranath Banerjee and Bipinchandra Pal.

Debendranath Tagore outlived the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* by nearly half a century. During the rest of his career he lived mainly the detached life of a spiritual *sadhaka* and a mystic. His deeply religious nature gradually asserted itself more and more and led him away to the seclusions of the spiritual life. A patriarch of the Brahmo Samaj, he continued to enjoy the respect of all sections of his countrymen and remained to the end of his days one of the most venerable figures of the Bengal Renaissance. Attractive though it is, this part of his life falls outside the scope of the present article.

## 5

### ISWAR CHANDRA VIDYASAGAR

(1820-1891)

*Benoy Ghose*

Vidyasagar was a boy of ten only and a student of Sanskrit College in Calcutta, when Rammohan Roy sailed for England in November 1830. Rammohan's death in Bristol in December 1833 created a void in the newly awakened Bengali society, difficult to fill in. The mantle of Rammohan should have naturally fallen upon the two social groups—his associates or the Brahmo Sabhaites, and the Derozians or Young Bengal. But none of the associates of Rammohan was equal in intellectual and personal stature to him and none could therefore go up to fill the void. The Derozians were then just “expanding like the petals of young flowers”, to quote the words of their teacher-poet Derozio, and stretching “their wings to try their strength”. And the tragedy is that they were also suddenly orphaned by the premature death of their philosopher and guide Derozio in December 1831.

Thus the third decade of the nineteenth century opened with very grim prospects for the radicals and reformers of Bengal. The stage was left open for the conservatives to marshall their strength and march in, to spread confusion in the ranks of the progressives by fierce counter-attacks and to force them to retreat. The first victory of the progressives had sounded with the legal prohibition of the practice of



*Sati* (burning of Hindu widows on the pyre of their dead husbands) in December 1829, and the conservatives almost immediately rallied round their newly organised *Dharmo Sabha* (1830) for crushing the efforts of the reformers. The social tension thus created was further aggravated at that time by the proselytizing activities of the Christian missionaries in Calcutta, particularly by the spell created by the celebrated Scottish missionary and educationist Alexander Duff and his colleagues upon the young Derozians. The situation has been best described by Duff himself in these words: "The prevalent idea seemed to be, that by fair means or foul—by bribery or magical influence—by denunciation or corporeal restraint—we were determined to force the young men to become Christians". It was natural therefore that the thunder of the conservatives grew louder and louder and the extremist activities of the young Hindu radicals were subjected to heavy artillery fire from both press and platform. In 1831 the Derozians were writing about it in their organ *The Enquirer*: "The bigots are up with their thunders of fulmination... The orthodox are in a rage; let them burst forth into a flame. Let the Liberal's voice be like that of the Roman, a Roman knows not only to act but to suffer". The cry of the Derozians was: "If the opposition is violent and insurmountable let us rather aspire to martyrdom than desert a single inch of the ground we have possessed. A people can never be reformed without noise and confusion".

There is no doubt that the Derozians bore the sufferings like Romans. But their actions were mainly confined to talking and arguing in debating societies, which multiplied at that time (and in which bigotry, high-handed tyranny, superstition and Hindu orthodoxy were denounced in no measured terms). There was really much noise and confusion during the whole of the thirties, but how far the people were being reformed through it none can say. The noise, above all, seemed to be the only reality. In the midst of this noise, and very near to its centre of origin at *Goldighi* or College

Square, where Sanskrit College and Hindu College stood on the same compound, Vidyasagar, then a budding teenager and a student of Sanskrit College, was devoting his best attention to classical sanskrit literature and philosophy. Time had not yet come for him to step down from the cloudland of classical literature to the social reality of his times, to take up the leadership and steer the ship of progress through the rising waves of opposition. The thirties passed away in confusion. Matters were settling down in the forties, mainly under the sobering influence of Debendranath Tagore and his *Tattvabodhini Sabha*. Vidyasagar also was freed from his student-life in the beginning of the forties (December 1841). In the fifties we find him emerging as an undisputed leader of the reformers in Bengal. The rising middle class had to wait for about two decades for a poor Brahmin boy to rise up the social scale and to get intellectually equipped for resuming the leadership of the fight for social progress left by Rammohan.

The question that crops up naturally in our mind is that how it became possible for a man like Vidyasagar, having nothing that rank and fortune could bestow, to wield such profound influence upon a growing generation, and to guide and shape them? The inevitable answer would be that the sterling character and intellect of Vidyasagar led him to this unique position. But that is surely not the whole answer to the most important question we have raised. In spite of the excesses of a few, most of the Derozians were men of invincible character and integrity. Debendranath and his followers were men of talent and character. But intellect, talent and character alone could not produce a great leader. Something more was needed for that at that time. Conviction and courage, action and decision were needed more than mere intellect or integrity. It appeared from every step of Vidyasagar's action in the field of education and reformation that here was, at long last, a man on the spot who knew perfectly well where he stood on every problem of his day in an altogether unusual degree. There was none at that

time who could equal him in the harmonious blending of thought and action, theory and practice, in his character. When the need required it, on all questions of the day, Vidyasagar's mind opened and shut smoothly and exactly like the breech of a gun. He gave the solid impression of a man who measured all things according to settled standards and sure convictions. And hardly there was any lag between his conviction, decision and action. If one is to choose the greatest characteristic of Vidyasagar, we would suggest that this massive finality stands forth, for good or ill, above and beyond all others.

In some respects this was a limitation of Vidyasagar's character. If he had a little flexibility of judgment and a willingness to assume a somewhat humbler attitude towards others, he might have played his part more effectively in history. But his opinions, it seemed, had been cut in bronze since the prime of his life. This was in his blood, this pride and sternness, the traditional characteristics of the sect of *Rarhiya* Brahmins (upper-caste Brahmins of lower western Bengal) to which Vidyasagar belonged. He rigidly maintained the austerity of his caste throughout his life, in his simple dress and habits, and in his personal manners and attitudes. He represented the best of our Brahmanic culture but kept his mind always open for welcoming the best in the culture of the West. And he had the courage to reject with equal contempt the stale and the harmful in both cultures, without any emotional bias either for his own traditional culture or for the intruding culture of the West. He therefore could not see eye to eye either with the orthodox Traditionalists or with the zealous Anglicists. He had love, respect and admiration for the Brahmo Sabhaites and the Derozians, and he had always a great ally in them in his crusade against social evils and educational backwardness. But for that he never became a Brahmo or a Derozian himself and he never felt like submitting uncritically to their views on social and religious matters. He knew where he stood, and he stood all

along the track of his life, alone as a towering individual, aloof from and above all the moderate and radical 'social groups' of his time. This was also a limitation of a great social leader like him, this repugnance for any sort of collective group-activity and this supreme faith in one's own infallibility. But here perhaps we see in him the ideal development of a Renaissance personality, the emergence of the rugged ego and individual, with Promethean consciousness of doing good to humanity in one's own way. At a time when Democracy was still in its swaddling clothes and the new urban Bengali middle class, who would welcome its advent, was babbling about it in the debating societies, some sort of ruthless individualism as in Vidyasagar was perhaps a necessity for handling great matters, taking great decisions and doing solid and substantial work.

Vidyasagar learnt the English numerals by counting the milestones on the way from his village home to the new city of Calcutta. It was a painful journey on foot, which he undertook with his father, at the age of eight in 1828. It symbolised the historic journey from a backward village, the citadel of reaction, to the new urban milieu of Calcutta, the centre of a new social mobility, new economy, new learning and culture. The first phase of his life ended with his arrival at Calcutta. The second phase started with his student life at Sanskrit College and ended after long twelve and a half years, from June 1829 to December 1841. These were eventful and turbulent years in the social life of Bengal, but he had only watched them from behind the bars of his College windows, and he could not throw himself in their midst. The milestones of Vidyasagar's own life began to stand forth clearly along the way, after the end of this phase. The first milestone marked his first appointment in the Fort William College as *Sheristadar* or Head Pandit of the Bengali department in December 1841, and later as Assistant Secretary of Sanskrit College in April 1846, and again as Head Writer and Treasurer of Fort William College in March 1849. The second milestone at the summit of his life marked

his Principalship at the Sanskrit College in January 1851 and his headlong plunge into social and educational activities between 1855 and 1858. During these eight years he climbed up to the peak of his activity and glory, and after his resignation from the Principal's post in November 1858, which marked the third milestone of his life, he began to descend, slowly but steadily, through long and dull years of not very important independent activities, down to a state of painful isolation and bitter frustration, until his death in July 1891.

Before his appointment as the Principal of the Sanskrit College, Vidyasagar began his work as an educational reformer in right earnest. The Report which he submitted to the Council of Education in December 1850, when he was a Professor of Literature in Sanskrit College, for the improvement of classical education, is a document of great importance in our educational history. His frank criticism of the traditional syllabus for study, subjectwise, bore the impression of a rational and fearless mind, and an enterprising intellect as well. Without in anyway minimising the importance of classical education, he wanted to relate it to the needs of modern life and to rescue it from the baneful effects of mediæval scholasticism. This was his first bold step forward to educational reform, and by taking this step he acted as a great 'humanist', an educationist of the Age of Renaissance. As a natural corollary to this step, he opened the Sanskrit College to non-Brahmin-Baidya boys (December 1851) and wrote a sanskrit grammar (in 1851, 1853, 1854 and 1855) in Bengali by adopting a novel method. The obvious purpose of writing a sanskrit grammar in Bengali was to open the gateway of the sacred Temple of Classical Learning to all, irrespective of caste, by offering the secret key to them, and to break the hereditary monopoly of it by the priest-pundit class.

As a promoter of women's education and also of vernacular education, Vidyasagar did pioneering work. He was the co-adjutor and fellow-worker of Drinkwater Bethune,

when the Bethune Female School was founded in 1849-50, and since then he continued, as secretary till 1869 and after that as long as he lived, to take a keen interest in the welfare of the institution. Between November 1857 and May 1858, Vidyasagar established 35 girls' schools in Hugli, Burdwan, Midnapore and Nadia districts, with an average total attendance of 1300 girls. He also established within six months, between August 1855 and January 1856, twenty model vernacular schools in different districts. He was never satisfied with paper-plans and tall schemes unless he could work them out himself. The history of the Metropolitan College also bears testimony to his tremendous faith in action. When George Campbell, the Lieut-Governor of Bengal during the early seventies, realising the menace of the growing number of educated young men to British authority, proposed to abolish some of the mufassil colleges, it roused fierce opposition from the leaders of the English-educated community in Bengal. "While, however, the politicians and publicists indulged in protests and abuses", writes Bipinchandra Pal in his *Memories of my Life and Times*, "Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, realising the practical futility of these, resolved to establish and maintain out of his own resources, a college in Calcutta, under the name of the Metropolitan Institution. Its object was to find means of higher collegiate education to the youth of Bengal at such cost as was within their means".

Vidyasagar was an earnest and painstaking man whose heart beat the faster for the cause of suffering humanity and for anything which concerned the well-being and progress of his people. He wrote strongly against the evils of child-marriage in 1850, petitioned to the Government of India for the suppression of the practice of polygamy in 1855, and again in 1866. But the dearest and the noblest cause which he had fought for, staking everything in his life, was the remarriage of the Hindu widows. There had been much talk about it, in the press and in the societies and associations, since the days of Rammohan and Young Bengal but nothing

was done so far to make it a feasible proposition. Here again Vidyasagar rose to the occasion as a man of conviction and action. He wrote a series of articles and pamphlets in defence of his case by quoting scriptural authority, and sent a petition to the Government of India with the signatures of 987 persons appended to it, including that of his own, praying for an "act to declare the lawfulness of the marriage of the Hindoo Widows". He shook the entire conservative world and lashed it to fury within a few months. Radhakanta Dev, the leader of the orthodox Hindu community, sent a petition to the Government against the enactment of the law, appending 36,763 signatures to it as against Vidyasagar's 987. A bill however was introduced into the Council by J.P. Grant in November 1855, an Act was passed and it became a law on 26 July 1856. But Vidyasagar's work did not end with the getting of a law in his hand from the Government. At his initiative and under his supervision the first lawful Hindu widow remarriage of our country was ceremoniously celebrated in Calcutta on 7 December 1856. He had to face the enmity of the entire orthodox Hindu community but he bore that with iron composure. He stood firm in the midst of the tidal wave of a superstitious people's wrath, pierced by the arrows of his fanatic persecutors. He did not budge an inch from the ground he had gained, and as a matter of fact he defended his case very ably by every resource in his arsenal, hitting back his enemies with all his might. He continued to arrange for widow remarriages, staking his last resources, even at times his own life. Thus our national hero fought a battle for the cause of almost half of the exploited humanity, the women,—a battle which, from the social point of view, cannot be said to have been decisively won then. After about one hundred years, the full social significance of the cause for which Vidyasagar had fought and ruined himself is now beginning to be realised by the people.

The last phase of his life, of independent social, educational and literary activities, was fairly long, stretching from

1859 to 1891. Publishing the Bengali weekly *Somprokash*, conducting the *Hindoo Patriot* after Harishchandra's death, building up the Metropolitan Institution and College, writing a series of textbooks and social polemics, collecting and editing and annotating some original manuscripts of sanskrit classics like typical Renaissance scholars—these are some of his activities during this phase. It was evident that he was withdrawing himself from public life, in sheer disgust and hopelessness. Some of the new generation of young men however, the blooming nationalists and social reformers of the seventies and the eighties, like Surendranath Banerjee, Shivnath Sastri, Bipinchandra Pal, Durga Mohan Das, Dwarkanath Ganguly, Sundari Mohan Das and others, were inspired and guided by Vidyasagar's ideal. To quote from Bipinchandra's *Memories*: "In these days Brahma Samaj actively threw itself into the cause of social reform and particularly of widow remarriage. Many a young Hindu widow found shelter in Brahma families from where they subsequently got married. We also sometimes helped young Hindu widows to run away from their home and the protection of their families, and gave them shelter and education and, if possible, opportunities of remarriage in the Brahma Samaj."

Bipinchandra recollects here the events of 1884-85. It was the evening of Vidyasagar's life and certainly it was a matter of great solace to him to see the path taken by the cream of his country's youth, illumined by the flame lighted by him. But the triumphant march of Hindu Revivalism was also casting perilous shadows before his paling eyes. There was no peace for him, even in his last days. Broken under the heavy blows of his enemies, fatigued and frustrated beyond measure, crushed by the phenomenal ingratitude and pettiness of many for whom he staked so much—the old man sank and died on July 1891. The loving and respectful tears which his countrymen shed on his last farewell path were a small measure of the services he had rendered to them, and still more of the character he had borne.



## 6

MICHAEL MADHUSUDAN DATTA

(1824-1873)

*Bishnu Dey*

Perhaps it will be only fair to remind the reader that Bengali literature is quite young, and, it must be admitted, rather unimpressive in output and quality, if we compare it to certain young literatures of Europe. But at the back of it there is the shadow of the great Sanskrit culture which has been of considerable help in our development, and also a somewhat retarding force. And there has been, at least for a century or so, the wide world in the horizon, however limited or lopsided our knowledge of that world has been and perhaps still is, as our vision of Europe or of the modern world has been determined not by our own organic needs and their fulfilment, but by our English masters from the depriving point of view of their own parasitic needs.

It is on this background that our great men, Vidyasagar, Madhusudan Datta, Bankim Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore worked heroically and succeeded to an astonishing extent, in creating the modern part of our literature. They had to try to be aware of our own past, of our Sanskrit heritage and also of the wind from Europe. But the paths they had hewn out after much painful labour add to their glory, and we on our part have to keep the roads intact

with our fresh efforts. In the world of art and culture, inheritance has to be acquired afresh by every generation. And times have changed. Madhusudan and Bankim were loved and acclaimed by their reading public, and yet they were great experimentors. In those good old days, a writer could be a serious writer, a serious artist, and at the same time be a popular author. Our fathers and grandfathers had still something of an unsplit sensibility, some uniformity of good taste, however precarious the minority poise might have been.

But this happy fact in no way justifies the habit of academic persons to think of our literature and even its towering figures in analogy with those of English literature. To call Bankim our Scott or Michael our Milton explains nothing. As a matter of fact, this lazy proneness to analogy is not restricted, in our country, to literature or artwork alone. It is a part of our whole attitude to ourselves, to our own history, and the tempting shortcut has led us to no real understanding and solution of our diverse problems.

"I apprehend nothing to be so little useful as reasoning by analogy from Europe to India" wrote Canning in his letter to the Board of Directors, 1817.

Michael Madhusudan, one of the most stupendous figures in our meagre literature was a victim of this reasoning by analogy. Born in 1824, the same year which saw the birth of the 'Hindu Patriot' Harishchandra Mukherjee, Michael was a spoilt son. Thanks however to his mother, the boy Michael had grown quite familiar with the usual volumes of Bengali verse, a fact which is of significance in any explanation of the later phenomenon of his own Bengali verse.

Like many members of the new gentry in Bengal of those days, he wanted to follow and live up to this analogy and that, even when he was a quite young boy. But the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and *Kavi Kankān Chandi* were hard to shed off. As a matter of fact, the peculiar nature of

Michael's genius may be said to have flourished on and through this split, the division which was at the back of the whole of our Indo-Anglian period, socially, politically, psychologically. He picked up with age Sanskrit, Persian, Latin, Greek, English, French, German and Italian, but in the depths of his consciousness, Bengali had her submarine hold. That is why the absurd Anglo-Indian from Madras had to write his first notable play and his first still readable poem in Bengali.

Educated in Hindu College with remarkable teachers like Richardson, Michael went along on his primrose path to Europe. It was unnatural, no doubt, but it was unnatural in the midst of the most unnatural imposition on a whole people. As a matter of fact, there is a kind of whole-hogger logicity in Michael's anglification of himself. Most of our pioneers had given away their souls to Albion, though not the safer sanctities of the native home and social life. There were very few exceptions among our intellectual fore-runners like Vidyasagar who did not allow violence to his inner being, who intellectually faced Europe and was rightly fascinated by her humanism and not by the glamour which need not be taken as a necessary concomitant of the mad though superficial rush of the English bourgeoisie. Michael was impelled by his nature to exhaust the analogy to the lees and his conversion to Christianity was more for ingloriously secular reasons than spiritual. Unlike the Banerjees, poor Michael turned Christian in order to go to England: and at any rate managed to go to Madras.

It is interesting to speculate over Michael's reason or reasons for the return of the prodigal son. Obviously there was in the air the cry of Go back to Bengali. Vidyasagar, Debendranath Tagore, Akshoykumar Datta and Kaliprasanna Sinha were four of the notable figures in this movement. The Paikpara Singhas and Jotindramohan Tagore also had their share, and we know how Michael took to Bengali writing for the Belgatchia Theatre. Michael wanted to be an Englishman, but it did not pay. But surely that cannot be the

sole reason. Michael had the poet in him, and he came to find out that however finely one can speak and write letters in English (and, my dear fellow, as he would have said, he wrote real good letters in amazingly good English!), one cannot write poetry in an alien language.

That is why we find Michael writing to his great friend, 'the pedagogue of Midnapore', who had such astonishing good taste and such understanding of literature: "I never study to be grandiloquent like the majority of the 'barren rascals' that write books in these days of literary excitement. The words come unsought, floating in the stream of (I suppose I must call it) Inspiration..." In another letter he says to Rajnarain: "I had no idea, my dear fellow, that our mother tongue would place at my disposal such exhaustive materials, and you know I am not a good scholar. The thoughts and images bring out words with themselves,—words that I never thought I knew. Here is a mystery for you".

Indeed, the mystery is there for all of us. How could this outsider get in touch with the very genius of the language? It is true, his vocabulary was poor, he had to ask for the choice of synonyms the help of his pundits, he had many gaps in his semantics. But he did have a marvellous sense of the speech-rhythm and the hang of the idiom of the language. One may feel a little irritated by Michael's excessive use of *lo* and *rey*, yet one has to remember how frequent these two forms of address, these forms of our *tutoyer*, used to be among our women and also our men, and even now they are not uncommon in social areas where speech is still rooted in its native idiom and rhythm. That Michael revealed lapses in his unnatural and too quickly acquired education in Bengali is not the remarkable thing about him; what is remarkable is his uncanny sureness about the sound and movement of Bengali speech-rhythm and the raciness of the idiom, in spite of his at times cumbrous sanskriticism.

The source of this sureness must have been so deep that it could counteract the entire Hindu College and Madras phases of his Ferringhee youth. It must have sprung from the deeper levels of his psyche, from where poetry has its ultimate origin and whose play of fantasy is called Dreams. And Michael knew it, he wrote to his friend that he had "the heart of a proud silent lonely man of song"! So he did not have to wait for other people's direction to discover that "our 7 footed verse is our heroic measure", because "our language, as regards the doctrine of accent and quantity, is an apostate". In this connection I should point out that some of us have found this seven-footed verse or *payar* a little too terse and at the same time not iambically sonorous enough and have added two more to Michael's seven. But the result has been usually a tendency towards verbosity and a slight weakness in the fibre of the strophe. As a matter of fact, Bengali verse has shown a certain proneness, after Michael, to linear self-sufficiency and a consequent singsong quality and not enough of the unity of the strophe with its strong toil of grace, so important in any genuine verse. Further, that this source of his poesy was very deep can be guessed at from the two sonnets called *Sringar*, which remind one of the famous love sonnet by Antoine de Baif and which curiously reveal how the fascination of the frame symbol of his great poem *Meghnad-badha* had its strength in the erotic symbology of the battle.

Michael started with this innate sense of the language mixed up in his very nervous organisation and he had enough of the European in him to know what was essential in verse, and he had wonderful good taste, considering that after all he was a provincial in the Victorian Empire of a people who had all the limitations of insularity with all the vices of a worldwide mercantile military domination.

Perhaps here I should remind the reader that the split in sensibility was quite a strong fact even in the good old days of our grandfathers, though awareness of this loss was

rare, and men with discrimination and sensibility were few indeed. There were a few men who could courageously react to good things and most of these few were Michael's patrons and friends. But they were few, and even among them there is only one Rajnarain Bose, who reveals himself as a man of very fine judgement. Let me make myself clear, I do not mean that only a handful of Hindu College Babus or the Paikpara brothers and their friends could appreciate Michael's poetry. The *.banian's* assistant could enjoy Michael's verse, so could the Chinabazar shopkeeper. The point is that the number of people with a genuine sensibility was very small and the dissociation that we find working in the wider field of our social and political life had affected the processes of the mind as well. There are various manifestations of this, direct and indirect, in the singular correspondence between Michael and his few friends. Our Rabindranath himself got quite confused between Michael and Hem. Even that wonderful man, as a man and a scholar, as a student of literature, Rajnarain, had his inhibitions for example regarding *Brajangana*. Or think of R—, most probably that prodigious scholar, critic, editor, historian and what not, Rajendralal Mitra, about whom Michael was compelled to write: "He reads Byron, Scott and Moore, very nice poets in their way, no doubt, but by no means of the highest school of poetry, except perhaps Byron, now and then. I like Wordsworth better...."

I hope the quotations I have been using serve a double purpose in their immediate context and also as illustrations of Michael's surprisingly mature judgement and sense of values. Perhaps it will be proper for me to give the reader at least one example of Michael's technical assurance:

Last evening I got a copy of the new *Meghnad* forwarded to your address. I hope it will reach you safe. After you go through the thing, you must lay aside all business and write to me; for there is no man whose opinion I value more than that of a certain Midnapur Pedagogue..

Allow me to give you an example of how the melody of a line is improved when the 8th syllable is long. I believe you like the opening lines of the 2nd Bk. of the *Meghnad*. In that description of evening you have these lines:

আইলা তারাকুন্তলা, শশীসহ হাসি  
শর্বরী ; বহিল চারিদিকে গন্ধবহ ।

(*aila tarakuntala, sasisaha hasi*  
*sarbari; bahilo charidike gandhabaha*)

How if you throw out the তারাকুন্তলা and substitute সূচাকৃতারা you improve the music of the line, because the double syllable স্ত (nta) mars the strength of লা (la). Read

আইলা সূচাকৃতারা, শশীসহ হাসি

শর্বরী (*aila sucharutara, sasisaha hasi*  
*sarbari—*)

and then সূগন্ধবহ বহিল চৌদিকে (*sugandha-baha bahilo chaudike*) and the passage assumes quite a different tone of music—

আইলা সূচাকৃতারা, শশীসহ হাসি  
শর্বরী, সূগন্ধবহ বহিল চৌদিকে,  
স্বসনে সবার কাছে কহিলা বিলাসী  
কোন কোন ফুলে চুম্বি কি ধন পাইলা

(*aila sucharutara, sasisaha hasi*  
*sarbari, sugandhabaha bahilo chaudike,*  
*susvane sabar kachhe kahila bilasi*  
*kon kon phule chumbi ki dhan paila*)

By the bye, these lines will no doubt recall to your mind the lines—'and whisper whence they stole those balmy spoils' of Milton, and the lines—'like the sweet south, That breathes upon a Bank of Violets stealing and giving odour' of Shakespear. Is not the চুম্বন (*chumban*) a more romantic way of getting the thing than 'stealing'?

It is, and so does the passage assume quite a different tone of music, though a reader may murmur at *সুচারুতার* (*sucharutara*) as the loss of strength of the second *লা* (*la*) and the muted repetition of *লা* (*la*) seem to have been quite a subtle change of key.

The non-Bengali reader will not be far wrong if he forms an idea of Michael as a very nineteenth century Bengali new middleclass person who drew the European analogy too far and thought that the Victorian age in India was equivalent to the Renaissance in Western Europe and who led a sadly untidy life, yet was a giant among Indian poets. But he should underline the last statement: Michael was possessed by poetry. And this poetry was nurtured in the Great mother as Yeats called it, in our old national life, in the memory of our entire people, in our myths and our popular poetry, before and beyond the split of our so-called Renaissance. Did not the Christian poet say: "I love the grand mythology of our ancestors. It is full of poetry".

But the question may be asked: Can any one who is full of poetry, even the poetry of his people, become necessarily a great poet in his own rights? Yes and no. Not unless his mind, or call it his imagination, can relate itself to this poetry with its past and its future; in other words, not unless there is a crisis, a tension which facilitates the growth of a poet's mind, the development of the agonistes. Usually however, the sense of poetry, the dæmonic fulness of it is a part of this other sense, one's own crisis, which is some sort of Awakening of the Spring as Tagore called it in his own case. We find it in Tagore and in almost all the major poets in Europe—some accession of the sense of hollowness, some kind of desertion, blank treachery, or it may be some illuminating joy, which restores the Imagination.

Michael had learnt his lesson in Calcutta and Madras, in London and in Versailles, as Wordsworth did differently when England declared war against the French Revolution.



He found out the hollowness, the bitter hollowness of the Indo-anglian renaissance, and luckily for him, though he could not repair his personal life, he could release himself as a poet *qua* poet. No wonder that he hated in his rage 'Rama and his rabble'. With his deep strength of a man of song and with his nerves used to the speech and poetry of Bengal, he did bring about a sort of tortured renaissance in India's poetry.

But as he himself knew, though his ambition was to write like Milton, yet he could not. "Many say it licks Kalidasa": perhaps his verse did that in certain ways. But he did not have the self-contained Puritan pride of Milton, the pride which made Milton an active and vehement partisan in his country's liberation, not from a foreign ruler but from old feudal ties. It was not merely Michael's own limitations, it was history which determined for him the limits of his achievement. And he was aware of his achievement in a very lonely manner, because he was almost alone in his knowledge of standards of criticism which are valid for the literature of the world.

Michael knew Europe better than most of his countrymen, and that seems to hold true even to-day; at least his knowledge of European literature was profound. He could enjoy and place Homer and Virgil, Shakespeare and Milton, Racine and Hugo. He knew his Dante, Petrarch and Tasso. With his wide reading and genuine taste, he had excellent standards. A believer in Europeanism like T.S. Eliot would have been pleased with this Indian poet, who also happened to be a Christian.

Mr. Eliot in his two highly suggestive lectures on Virgil has tried to give his view of this European civilisation. He has mentioned two stages, the classical period and the Christian, and the two representative poets, Virgil and Dante. Mr. Eliot thinks that the world can be saved and harmony brought about by this European civilisation. By Europe he means the western parts of Europe with its Christian and

pre-Christian heritage. Elsewhere he has explained away the post-Christian or capitalist stage of West European civilization as a mere complication in Economics. Humanistically, Mr. Eliot shuts out a large part of mankind and a large part of the world, and he does not want to consider the prospects of a post-capitalistic Europe with all the heritage of the classical, the Christian and the capitalist stages of European civilization. But it is obvious that only in the last stage can one think of one humanity and the world in harmony. That is the vision we find in the greatest prose epic of modern life, *Das Kapital*.

Michael tried to acquire the earlier heaven of European civilization, while he lived in the midst of the third stage in action in a highly civilised non-European country, which almost died in contact with this terribly greedy and ruthless hypocrisy. We millions of men outside Mr. Eliot's narrow world of European civilization, we also know Europe, from the other side of the medal, the most brutalising exploitation man has made of man.

However, Mr. Eliot is most illuminating when he talks about Virgil's appreciation of history of Rome, of Europe, of Virgil's sense of destiny in human history, of labour, pietas and destiny, and of Dante's amor and light. Virgil was fortunate in his Rome, as was Dante in his Florence. Michael could only see the cruellest parody of labour, pietas, and the destiny of man in history. He tried his best to discover in this dark world of no-love ways of release, and only the making of poetry was open to him. That was England's work in India, the work of so-called European civilization with its unsympathetic rule and policy of acquisition of money.

The tragedy of Michael Madhusudan Datta has a symbolic quality: it is the tragedy of false promises in the history of Anglo-India. Michael started to write in his mother tongue, three years after the Great Revolt of 1857. It is for us to learn his lesson and focus the history of our life aright, to try to create our Renaissance. Michael had realised, and quite early

in our modern period, the futility of our Anglo-renaissance and had regretted his homeless wanderings across fanciful foreign seas and in alien ports. Our renaissance can be forged only by the realisation of our own background, the life and culture of our entire people, from which roots alone can the Imagination flower, as Coleridge might have told us.

NOTE

Parts of this essay, as a first draft, appeared in a recent issue of the magazine *Quest*.

BANKIMCHANDRA CHATTERJI

(1838-1894)

*Subodh Chandra Sen Gupta*

If history teaches any lesson, it is the futility of making clear-cut divisions between one age and another. When, for example, did mediæval Europe end and the modern era of Renaissance begin? The handy date of 1453 when Greek scholars fled to Western Europe and set the new world in motion was rejected long ago. If the scientific spirit be the principal characteristic of modern Europe, no fifteenth or sixteenth century scientist evinces it more powerfully than Roger Bacon (1214?-1294). If the spirit of free enquiry be the dominant feature of the Renaissance, we have it in Wycliffe and Huss long before the flight of Greek scholars from Constantinople. Those who say that the modern world began with the geographical discoveries of Vasco Da Gama and Columbus forget that in 1336 the Genoese had a settlement in Southern China and that Mediterranean sailors had been scouring the Atlantic ever since the beginning of the fourteenth century. Yet there can be no doubt that all these activities would have remained sporadic and isolated ventures but for the impetus given by the re-discovery of ancient classical lore. The Renaissance which had many facets may be briefly defined as the apotheosis of man, and humanism is the essence of Greek culture.

The Indian Renaissance which may be said to have started in Bengal is in some respects different from the European. First of all, it can be more precisely dated. The awakening came with the advent of the English and the victory gained in 1757 by Clive at Plassey. The first and in a sense the greatest exponent of the Indian Renaissance, Raja Rammohan Roy, was born in 1772, fifteen years after Plassey. Another point of distinction is more fundamental. The leaders of Indian Renaissance did not find the seeds of humanism in ancient literature but in the new learning they sought to import from the West. No wonder when the Government proposed to found the Sanskrit College, Rammohan Roy opposed the idea on the ground that Sanskrit learning was barren and that it was calculated to "load the minds of youths with grammatical niceties and metaphysical distinctions of little or no practical use to the possessors or to society". So the Indian movement was a movement of discovery rather than re-discovery; it was *nascence* rather than *re-nascence*. Iswarchandra Vidyasagar (1820-91), the greatest product of the Sanskrit College, was oriental in his scholarship and dress but thoroughly western in his outlook as educationist and social reformer. Madhusudan Datta (1824-73), the greatest poet of this Renaissance, embraced Christianity, because the leading peoples of the world were Christians, and the Puranic stories of India went through a sea-change in his poetry. He did not like 'Rama and his rabble' and had nothing but contempt for the æsthetic principles enunciated by Visvanatha.

## 2

Bankimchandra Chatterji was born in 1838, five years after the death of Rammohan Roy, and he graduated from the Presidency College in 1858, a hundred years after the Battle of Plassey. By then the first wave of the new movement had spent itself, and the civil disturbance, popularly known as the Sepoy Mutiny, demonstrated that in the political field there was a desire to break loose from West-

ern fetters. The cultural movement that started at about this time was nationalist, if not reactionary. Bankimchandra was the greatest figure of the second phase of the Bengal Renaissance as Rammohan Roy was of the first. In this phase Bengal did not merely look beyond the seas to Western science and philosophy, she wanted also to look back at her own past heritage. But this movement was more comprehensive than a mere resurrection of ancient learning. It aimed at a synthesis between the East and the West and also to interpret the ancient scriptures from a rational and humanist point of view.

If we study the early novels of Bankimchandra we find renaissance humanism reflected in a sense of wonder at the greatness—and littleness—of man. The past history of India leaps into life in his pages in all its splendour. The conflict of the Moghuls and the Pathans in Bengal is vividly portrayed in his earliest novel—*Durgeshnandini*. Romantic as the history of Nurjehan is, Bankimchandra adds to its complexity in *Kapalkundala* by inventing the story of her rivalry with Moti Bibi. He gives too in *Mrinalini* an imaginative reconstruction of the last days of Hindu independence in Bengal when the effeminate Laksman Sen fled before the onset of Bakhtiyar Khilji. And he does not confine himself to depicting the romance of history. Nature is a protagonist in *Kapalkundala*, and not even Kalidasa in *Sakuntala* or Shakespeare in *Miranda* has better succeeded in portraying a heroine who has been nurtured away from the influences of ordinary human society. But more wonderful than anything else in Bankimchandra's novels is the human heart with its complicated motives and tempestuous passions. When Manorama in *Mrinalini* is reminded that she is nursing an unlawful passion, she pooh-poohs the idea and says that Love is like the Ganga rushing down the Himalayas and that anyone trying to control it would be as mad as the foolish elephant which once tried to stay the onset of the Ganga and was washed away.

It is characteristic of Bankimchandra that although he depicts the magnificence of man's history and the richness of human emotions, in his novels human affairs seem to be controlled by unseen forces, call them gods if you like. All his life Bankimchandra was interested in astrology and almost in all his novels there are persons trying to forecast the future. The early novels give an impression of the fundamental limitations of man's powers. The wise man knows the future, but his knowledge is a mockery. Abhiram Swami in *Durgeshnandini* calculated that, in the impending clash between the Pathans and the Moghuls, the latter would be victorious. But it is the Pathans who win. It cannot, however, be said that his calculations are wrong, for the leader of the Pathans used to be called, in fun, 'the Moghul General'! Madhavacharya in *Mrinalini* is certain that a trader from the west would put an end to Muslim rule in Bengal. And the sapient astrologer believes that this must be his protegee Hemchandra who once disguised himself as a trader and he was at Mathura, which is certainly to the west of Bengal! Bankimchandra does not at this stage seem to think that the gods are just nor does he say that they sport with men as wanton boys with flies. He seems to suggest that the gods have a logic of their own which man is powerless to understand.

## 3

Bankimchandra never wrote a better novel than *Kapalkundala*, but with the lapse of years his ideas are organized into what may almost be called a system of philosophy. And it is in keeping with the spirit of Renaissance—European as well as Indian—that he comes to have an increasing faith in man's powers and potentialities. In *Bishabriksha* (The Poison Tree), the future is clearly forecasted through a dream in the beginning of the novel and the subsequent events follow with the precision one may expect from a Greek tragedy. But it is also plainly suggested that the tragedy has its roots in character and that if the hero

possessed greater self-control, it might have been averted. 'The fault, Dear Brutus, is in us', and the stars only award rewards and punishments. In *Chandrasekhar*, accidents do play a part, but Dalani Begum would not have lost her life, if the Nawab, her husband, had been wiser. Ramananda Swami, an astrologer and a sage, is gifted with wonderful powers. He can see into the future and also control the workings of the human mind. Saibalini loved Pratap and was indifferent to her husband Chandrasekhar. By means of his superhuman powers the *sannyasin* enables her to subdue her passion for Pratap and transform it to wifely devotion. Indeed, we have travelled far away from *Mrinalini*, where Manorama compared reason trying to control passion to a mad elephant staying a swelling stream.

There is a *sannyasin* with miraculous powers in *Rajani*, but not in *Krishnakanta's Will*, another novel of this period. But the basic idea is the same. Man's reason is supreme. If we cultivate our faculties in the right manner, if reason is properly illuminated and the will-power rightly directed, there is nothing we cannot achieve. The *sannyasin* in *Rajani* can restore eye-sight to a blind girl, and what is more, he can direct the course of human emotions. There is no miracle in *Krishnakanta's Will*, which is, in some respects, the tensest of all Bankimchandra's novels. But Bhramar is a woman with superhuman strength of character, and although she is young, inexperienced in the ways of the world, and almost uneducated, her tremendous will-power gives her oracular insight into the future, and when her husband deserts her, it seems that events in the story move only to confirm her predictions. Here, indeed, is the Indian version of the Renaissance apotheosis of man—or woman. The creation of Bhramar may be said to mark a definite stage in the development of Bankimchandra's genius. Suryamukhi, the heroine of the earlier novel *Bisha-briksha* is, in many respects, an embodiment of the same idea. But she is a paler figure, having neither Bhramar's tremendous will-power nor her prophetic



vision. In Bhramar, Bankimchandra has a firm grasp on his own ideology.

But is this ideology completely satisfactory or has it been reflected in more vital art? That is a question which many will ask, though it will not be possible to discuss it thoroughly here. Why does the philosophy of Ramananda Swami involve—or why can it not prevent—the self-immolation of Pratap? Is Saibalini more lovable in her repentance or in her sin? Which of Nagendranath's two wives is the more memorable figure in *Bisha-briksha*—the pious Suryamukhi or Kundanandini who brought so much unhappiness to herself and to others? Why is there an undertone of melancholy behind Labangalata's dash and vivacity? Why does she part from Amarnath in the midst of tears and suggest that though in this life she is not permitted to love the man who is not her husband, she might be united to him in another world that will open out to them after death? *Rajsimha* is an historical novel, narrating mighty events and drawing pointed attention to the seeds of decay behind the splendour of Moghul imperialism; but the most moving episode is that of Zeb-unnisa, Mobarak and Daria—an amoral story of passion and pain. It is here that Bankimchandra gives expression to the basic Renaissance idea that all that a man or woman desires in the fulness of the heart must be intrinsically beautiful, and it is here, too, that he reaches forward to successors and critics like Saratchandra Chatterjee, who have tried to reveal the beauty and sweetness of love that is not sanctioned by society.

But the world he creates is larger than theirs. The novel since his time, especially in the hands of Rabindranath and Saratchandra, has gained in subtlety and poetical beauty, but it has become thinner and smaller. The undying appeal of Bankimchandra's novels lies primarily in this that although not epical, they introduce us to a world which extends over a large area in space and covers a long period of time, and this world is inhabited by men and women of

a larger build than is to be found in life or in the novels of other Bengali novelists. They do not lust for power or knowledge in the manner of Tamburlaine or Dr. Faustus but they have strength of will and are swayed by overwhelming passion. In the historical and semi-historical novels, the canvas is obviously large, but even in the domestic novels, such as *Krishnakanta's Will* or *Rajani*, which deal with ordinary themes, the men and women—Bhramar and Rohini in the former, the *sannyasin*, Amarnath and Labangalata in the latter—are extraordinary people. And in almost all the novels we feel that human life is related to superhuman powers who, though unseen, reveal themselves in dreams or in the calculations of hermits and sages. *Bisha-briksha* recounts an ordinary story of love, suffering and redemption but the dream projected by Kunda's mother endows it with supramundane significance.

## 4

It may be interesting to explore what Bankimchandra means by the advent of the supernatural in human affairs. Although a confirmed theist, he mentions God rarely in his novels and it would have taken away from the human interest of his stories if God had intervened frequently in terrestrial affairs. The Destiny that he envisages has not the mystery and capriciousness of the Destiny we find in Shakespeare's tragedies. Neither is it as stern and unbending and aloof as the Fate of the Greek tragedians. Destiny here is not also the ironist conceived by Thomas Hardy. It is immanent in human character and that is why man may control it, if his intellect is illuminated and his will directed by the moral sense. Bankimchandra did not look upon the moral sense as the product of environmental socio-economic conditions; rather he regarded it as something divine. From that point of view, he may be called a traditionalist, a purveyor of out-moded ideas. But we need not be in a hurry to condemn him. For whatever environmental changes may take place, purification through self-control will always be a

means to the attainment of ends, and indeed, it may be said to be an end in itself, an intrinsic value.

This is the substance of the religion of Culture Bankimchandra preaches in his later novels, and it is implicit in all his writings. It is made up of a synthesis of what he learnt from the *Gita* and from Auguste Comte and the Author of *Ecce Homo*. He had firm faith in God, but man must properly cultivate his faculties and if he can achieve intellectual illumination and moral control, he will be a God or God will come to him. Sometimes the idea is crudely presented, as when in *Devi-Chaudhurani*, the novelist appears in the role of an interpreter and says that God sent a storm only to help his heroine—an embodiment of Culture—at a critical moment. The propaganda occasionally becomes obtrusive in *Sitaram* and *Devi-Chaudhurani*, two novels of the final period, and some of us feel that, inspite of beauties here and there, there is a deterioration in his art. But there is no doubt about his sturdy humanism. His interpretation of Lord Krishna in *Krishna-Charitra*, an experiment in biographical reconstruction, has been scoffed at as a bowdlerized version of the Puranical story. But there is no doubt about the novelty of his point of view. '*Ecce Homo* (Behold the man.)'—that is what he seems to say to his readers. He presents Krishna, the Lord of the *Bhakti* cult, not as a God but as the perfect Man.

Hinduism has three main cults—the cult of *Bhakti*, the cult of *Jnana* and the cult of *Karma*. These are the three ways in which salvation may be obtained. Although there have been attempts at a synthesis of these cults, philosophers and religious teachers generally lay emphasis on one of these cults at the expense of the other two. Bankimchandra seems to lay stress on *Jnana* or Knowledge, although he also asserted that spiritual illumination leads to selfless action, and such action aims at and is inspired by faith in God (*Bhakti*). And Praphulla, his heroine in *Devi-Chaudhurani*, attained perfection through a synthesis of the three prin-

ciples. In *Anandamath* he preaches, through the Great Sage, his own doctrine that true Hinduism does not mean worship of three hundred and thirty millions of gods nor is action or performance of *rituals* its basis. It lays emphasis on mental illumination or knowledge or what Bankimchandra himself would call 'culture' (*anusilan*) as the foundation of religion. This knowledge or culture embraces both knowledge of the external world and spiritual illumination. Hinduism degenerated into a superstitious cult because it sought to cultivate the Spirit to the utter neglect of external knowledge. This is what it has to borrow from Western science and philosophy, and then only will its spiritual culture be given the right orientation.

## 5

Rammohan Roy, the pioneer of the Indian Renaissance in its first phase, was also a great Sanskritist, and it is due to his influence primarily that there has been wide and intensive study of the Upanishads in Bengal in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But his outlook was largely that of a Westerner, and as pointed out already, he opposed the establishment of Sanskrit College in Calcutta. Bankimchandra's attitude was different from Rammohan's. Rammohan founded Brahmoism and Bankimchandra may be said to be a champion of the revival of Hinduism. The new Hinduism may receive light from the West, but it will be essentially Hindu—in both letter and spirit. As the years passed on, Bankimchandra became more and more militant in his zeal for the resuscitation of Hindu culture. In *Sitaram*, his latest novel, he regrets that Hindus have now abandoned study of the *Gita* in favour of Mill, they prefer Swinburne's poetry to Kalidasa's *Kumarasambhavam* and, in utter ignorance of the marvels of Orissan art, are fascinated by clay dolls imported from Europe. He is not sure if the influence exercised by Ramananda Swami in *Chandrasekhar* is what modern science calls 'psychic force' or the spiritual power

at the command of an Indian *yogi*. But he has no doubt that the *sannyasin* in *Rajani* can effect miraculous cures which the medical science of modern Europe cannot dream of. It may be that he is extravagant in his commendation of ancient Indian culture, but his point of view is unmistakable.

It is in this phase of his career that he came to be regarded as the father of modern Indian nationalism. He is the *rishi* of *Bande Mataram*, our most popular—and possibly our greatest—national song, and *Anandamath* was a Bible for secret revolutionaries who modelled their societies on the organisation founded by Satyananda, the hero of this novel. The Mother conceived by him is said to smack of idolatry, but she is a poetical symbol, and no poetical symbol, passionately imagined, can be denuded of idolatrous associations. What is important is that the Mother is an inspiring image, living to the tips of her fingers, and it is doubtful if there is any patriotic poem in any literature comparable with Bankimchandra's *Bande Mataram*. One has only to think of the portrait of Cathleen ni Houlihan and Carducci's *Ode on the Clitumnus* to realize the full beauty of Bankimchandra's conception of the Mother.

The complaint has been made that in his enthusiasm for the revival of Hinduism, he was unfair to the Muslims and that his portrait of Aurangzebe is worse than a caricature. That Bankimchandra was a zealous Hindu cannot be denied, but it will be untrue to say that he did not regard Indian Muslims as children of the soil with the same rights and claims as the Hindus. In his economic essays, he championed the cause of Hashim Sheik, the Muslim peasant, as much as that of Rama Kaivarta, his Hindu counterpart. We have also to put beside his caricature of Aurangzebe the moving portrait of the *faqir* in *Sitaram* and other sympathetic Muslim characters in other novels. Coming to Aurangzebe, we may point out that he makes it clear that he does not look upon the bigoted Emperor as a typical Muslim. If even so the por-

traiture is imperfect, it is because Bankimchandra, who was a novelist, and no scientific historian, was misled by Manucci who was an adherent of Dara. The Mother in *Bande Mataram* has, it is said, too much likeness to a Hindu goddess, but the many images also make it clear, as Mahendra, too, points out in the novel, that it is the portrait of the Motherland which the references to Hindu goddesses only help to limn. There are beautiful patriotic songs—Rabindranath's *Jana gana*, for example—which have not these associations, but they are far less concrete. The ending in *Anandamath* has been criticised as paying an unnecessary tribute to the English, but that is only a concession to the laws then in force—a price which the author, a Government official, had to pay if his book was not to be banned. No one should take it seriously except in so far as it presses for the assimilation of all that is best in European culture.

## 6

Last, and first, Bankimchandra is a great novelist, one of the greatest in Bengali literature, and great anywhere and by any standard. Dr. Srikumar Banerjee has justly pointed out that the path from Vishnupur to Mandaran, followed by the horseman in 997 B.S. in the first chapter of Bankimchandra's earliest novel *Durgeshnandini*, is the path which subsequent writers in Bengali fiction have trodden. He was a great story-teller who could movingly tell of moving accidents by flood and field and also recount equally enchanting tales of natural sorrow, loss or gain. He had also the other great gift of the novelist: he could people his world with living men and women, and lastly, his descriptions of scenes—natural and human—have the glow and colourfulness of first-rate painting. When, therefore, we tire of the thinness and supersubtle psychology of modern fiction, we turn with relief to the vaster and more tumultuous world created by Bankimchandra Chatterjee. Here if anywhere there is God's plenty.

## NOTE

Born at Kanthalpara in the district of Hughli, 26 June 1838; educated at Hughli College and Presidency College, Calcutta; one of the two first Graduates (1858) of the University of Calcutta; entered Government Service as a Deputy Magistrate, 7 August 1858, and served for 33 years in different places in Bengal, retiring on 14 September 1891; died 8 April 1894.

Principal publications include: (i) novels and stories—\* *Durgeshnandini* (1865), \* *Kapalkundala* (1866), *Mrinalini* (1869), \* *Bishu-briksha* (1873), \* *Indira* (1873), \* *Yugalanguriya* (1874), \* *Chandrasekhar* (1875), \* *Radharani* (1875), \* *Rajani* (1877), \* *Krishna-kanter Will* (1878), *Rajsinha* (1882), \* *Anandamath* (1882), *Devi Chaudhurani* (1884), \* *Sitaram* (1887).

(Titles marked with \* have been translated into English). His only English novel—also his first—*Rajmohan's Wife* was serialized in the *Indian Field* in 1864.

(ii) Essays, satires, biographies etc.—*Lokarahasya* (1874), *Kamala-kanter Daptar* (1875), *Krishna-Charitra* (1886), *Vividha-Prabandha* I (1887), II (1892), *Dharmatattwa* (1888).

(iii) Journalism: edited *Bangadarsan* (1872-76), a cultural magazine, and helped to found *Prachar* (1884-89), a monthly devoted to the propagation of Hinduism.

## 8

BRAHMANANDA KESHUB CHANDRA SEN

(1838-1884)

*Amiya Charan Banerji*

There was a recrudescence of the dark age in India in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The condition of India at this period can be described vividly in the words of Rabindra Nath Tagore: "To know my country, one has to travel to that age, when she realised her soul and thus transcended her physical boundaries, when she revealed her being in a radiant magnanimity which illumined the eastern horizon, making her recognised as their own by those in alien shores who were awakened into a surprise of life, and not now when she has withdrawn herself into a narrow barrier of obscurity, into a misery of pride of exclusiveness, into a poverty of mind that dumbly revolves around itself in an unmeaning repetition of a past that has lost its sight and has no message for the pilgrim of the future".

Amongst such surroundings, about one hundred and eightyfour years ago, Raja Rammohan Roy was born. Superstitions and cruel customs played havoc in Hindu society. The burning of widows in those days was a common practice. The poor meekly submitted to the tyrannies of the rich. The woman suffered terribly from many unjust and oppressive customs. She was completely dominated by man.



Modern science had not yet begun to dispel ignorance, superstition and blind faith. The Hindu orthodoxy formed almost an immovable barrier on the path leading to progress and development. This was the set-up of the Hindu society specially in Bengal when Rammohan Roy appeared on the scene. His was the mighty genius who tore to pieces the arguments advanced by orthodox pundits in support of idolatrous and superstitious practice and of the cruel custom of *Satidaha*. In religion, in education and in the political sphere he gave the start to national awakening about one hundred and fifty years ago. He was indeed the father of the Indian Renaissance. During the period of the Renaissance, a galaxy of inspired religious leaders, great social reformers, noble patriots, eminent political thinkers and mighty literary geniuses appeared in India and especially in Bengal. Next to Rammohan Roy, Keshub Chandra Sen was the greatest exponent of Modern India.

During the life-time of Keshub Chandra Sen, India passed through stirring times which saw many revolutionary changes in human ideas, thoughts and in the entire outlook of life. The social, economic and political structure of the country could not escape the tremendous impact of these changes. The wave of rationalism that passed over Europe had its ripples also in India. Blind faith and superstitions gave way to uncompromising rationalism sponsored by Karl Marx, Herbert Spencer and others. Religion was on its trial. It had to face the charges of being unprogressive, unscientific and even anti-social in character. Keshub Chandra took up the challenge of extreme rationalism on the one hand and of blind faith on the other. He differentiated between true religion and pseudo-religion. He showed that true religion is neither unscientific nor irrational in its character. The life which he lived was the real test of what religion could achieve in practice by actual performances in domestic life, in social contacts, in public life and in the achievement of amelioration of the conditions of life of his fellow-beings.

Keshub Chandra was a born leader, a dynamic man of action and a magnetic personality. He was a genuine nationalist and vindicated the cause of India and Asia before Europe and America. He was the real ambassador of the Orient to the Occident. He interpreted the culture of the East and delivered its spiritual messages to the West. By analysing the history of the Brahmo Samaj of this period we find that Keshub gave a most powerful impetus to the movement of personal freedom and democracy. He fought incessantly for acceptance of individual reason and conscience against external authority and of democracy against any autocracy in any form of government. He insisted that:—

- (a) Individual reason should be free to determine what is true and rational and what is untrue and irrational without the intervention of the authority of scriptures.
- (b) Individual conscience should be free to determine what is right and what is wrong in matters of personal conduct and of domestic, social and public relations.
- (c) The fundamental principle of democracy should be adopted in church government and in the management of other organisations. The majority of the members of the Board of Control of any Institution should determine how the affairs of the Institution should be conducted.

In advocating personal freedom he insisted that there should always be sweet reasonableness in the person concerned and there should be harmony of opinions and convictions with life and conduct.

Keshub Chandra repudiated caste system in the strongest terms and encouraged intermarriage between different castes and communities as the most effective step for the abolition of caste system and the unification of different communities in India. He revolted against the usual practice in the Adi

Brahmo Samaj of permitting only the Brahmins wearing 'sacred thread' to sit on the *Vedi* for conducting divine service. He was mainly responsible for the enactment of the Special Marriage Act III of 1872. This has now been replaced by the Special Marriage Act of 1954. Keshub ultimately seceded from the Adi Brahmo Samaj and founded Bharatbarshiya Brahmo Samaj. In the words of Bipin Chandra Pal, the newly formed Brahmo Samaj "repudiated the law of caste thereby not only proclaiming the equality of all humans but seeking to build up a society where the equality will be established upon a religious basis". In 1863, Keshub Chandra gave an inspiring address on *Social Reformation in India*. About caste system he said in this address: "The Samaj does not seek to destroy caste as an institution distinct from Hinduism by setting up a purely secular movement to oppose its laws and principles. It seeks to establish the equality of men on religious grounds, and thus indirectly abolish caste distinctions. It wages a purely religious war with all evils".

During Keshub's time the culture of the West had a tremendous impact on that of the East, which unsettled the minds of the youth. God was scoffed at, scepticism ran amock, and morality was despised. Drunkenness and other fashionable vices became widely prevalent in the land. Young Bengal, nay Young India, lost its bearings, revolted and began to leave the pale of Hindu society. Keshub saw the danger. He knew that the youth shaped the destiny of the country. He had deep concern for the welfare of the youth of his time. Keshub sounded a grave but timely warning. He was able to halt the spirit of revolt and stop demoralisation and denationalisation that had begun to corrupt the Hindu society. Keshub wrote out two remarkable tracts viz. *Young Bengal, this is for you* and *An appeal to Young India*. These two treatises created a tremendous impression on the minds of the youth. In the first tract he warned our countrymen against godless education which was responsible for rendering incalculable mischief to our land. About godless education Keshub said: "Not only has it shed

its baneful influence upon the individual but it has proved an effective engine in counteracting the social advancement of the people and in rendering more frightful the intellectual, domestic and moral destitution of the millions of our countrymen". He further declared: "To the influence of ungodly education is to be attributed the want of progress in the social conditions of the country".

Even at the present moment we come across two schools of thought. One school deplores godless type of education and the other school accuses religion of being unscientific and irrational and of leading men to superstitions and blind beliefs. But Keshub was clear in his ideas and he was quite prophetic in his words. He could foresee the ill effects of godless education. He warned his fellow countrymen about it in the following words: "If intellectual progress went hand in hand with religious developments, if our educated countrymen had initiated themselves in the living truths of religion, patriotism would not have been mere matter of oration, but a reality in practice. Society would have grown in health and prosperity..... That unity and nationality which are considered a great desideratum would have been established". He spared no pains in his attempt to rouse his countrymen from stupor, to stabilise the unsettled condition of his land due to the faulty system of education and to give an impulse to the wave of national awakening.

The emancipation of women was one of the main items of the social reconstruction programme of Keshub Chandra. He realised that for the speedy advancement of the country this freedom is absolutely necessary. In one of his addresses he said: "No country on earth ever made sufficient progress in civilisation whose women were sunk in ignorance. In fact the actual position of the women is an index to the social status of the nation to which they belong". He asserted that, in order to elevate India to a fitting place in the scale of nations, "we must try to liberate our women from the thralldom of ignorance and superstition". He firmly believed

that true prosperity of society depends on the "harmony of sexes". He averred: "From early infancy to mature age, the influence of mother, sister, wife and female society generally has always continued to be felt and prized. By their gentle, soft, sweet temper women exercise an irresistible influence over men. In those things where man excels woman, let man's voice be heard, where woman excels man, let her voice be heard".

He was strongly against any attempt to denationalise Indian women. He had definite views about their emancipation. He would not allow women to have freedom without education nor permit them to move in society without looking to their intellectual and moral culture. He said: "I should place education, moral training and social reformation first, and these will in the natural course of things lead to what is called emancipation of women". He opined on another occasion: "It is impossible to immure a 'native' woman in the Zenana if she received a sound education. But then do not bring about violent changes in this matter. It is a most delicate experiment, and ought to be tried in a most delicate manner". Keshub believed in evolution and not in revolution. Keshub was not merely an idealist but also a man of action. His strong practical sense impelled him to start various institutions for the benefit of woman. He founded the Antapur Stri Siksha Sabha which trained and provided women teachers to teach the ladies in individual families. He also started the Brahmica Samaj for promoting religious culture and technical education among the ladies. Later on schools for women were established for imparting education suited to the needs and requirements of the ladies.

In 1882 Keshub formed a scheme of education for women, and this scheme was placed before the Senate of the Calcutta University by Father Lafont for consideration. Two journals, *Bamabodhini Patrika* and *Paricharika*, were founded by Keshub Chandra for the cultural education of women. They

were read with great avidity by the ladies of the province and even by those who were outside the pale of the Brahmo Samaj. These two journals helped in a great measure to bring about the enlightenment of the fair sex and to stimulate their thirst for knowledge.

Keshub realised that no regeneration of India is possible and no national awakening can be brought about unless there be genuine efforts to uplift the masses of India and to raise their status. Long before the birth of the Harijan Movement and the crusade against untouchability initiated by Mahatma Gandhi, Brahmananda Keshub Chandra saw with prophetic vision that unless the differences between the classes and the masses, between the high castes and the low castes, and between various creeds are eliminated no national unity is possible, and consequently no salvation of our country will be achieved. Hence he spared no efforts to serve the masses. He formulated a scheme for mass education which was perhaps the first of its kind in Bengal, nay in India. It was not merely a theoretical scheme and it was given a practical shape when he founded the Workingman's Institution. His scheme for Primary Education included the following:—

- (a) A competent Indian should be appointed Inspector-General of Vernacular Schools.
- (b) A large number of Night Schools for agricultural and working classes should be opened.
- (c) The masses should be instructed in useful subjects such as Elementary Science etc.
- (d) Grants-in-aid rules should be relaxed in favour of the schools for the lower classes of people.
- (e) Itinerant teachers should give popular lectures in village schools.
- (f) Cheap newspapers which were approved and subsidized by Government should be freely distributed in villages.

- (g) Land-holders should encourage and help in the establishment of schools for mass education in the villages.
- (h) For organising an effective system of Primary Education, Keshub recommended that the really wealthy of all classes, European and Indian officials and non-officials—landlords, merchants, traders, bankers, submit to a small educational tax on their income.

Keshub Chandra published a cheap weekly newspaper in Bengali at one pice per copy named *Sulav Samachar*. Such a venture was perhaps the first of its kind in the journalistic sphere of India. This weekly paper was read with great avidity by the lower classes. Its publication was very helpful in spreading education among the masses. Keshub Chandra was indeed a true socialist with a clear vision and he did realise that there could not be any real freedom unless the masses are awakened from their stupor and the gulf between different classes, castes and creeds is bridged.

Keshub Chandra's socialism differs from other forms of socialism or communism in one main aspect. The socialism of Keshub Chandra is that of a true theist, whereas the socialism or rather the communism of Karl Marx is that of a non-believer in God.

In 1871, Keshub Chandra published an article in Bengali in *Sulav Samachar* with the caption 'Big Men'. An English translation of a few extracts from the article is given below:

Who are really 'Big Men'? The lower classes of our country. If they do not exist, who would be able to get his food; who would be able to drive in his carriage to see the Races; who would be able to recline on a cosy cushion and smoke his hubble-bubble? Be mindful, the common people have sacrificed everything. We are

having our pleasure and enjoyment at their cost. But how many of us think of showing gratitude to them? They are providing food for us by toiling day and night and by the sweat of their brows, but how many of us think about their condition even once? Time will come, when they will no longer keep quiet, nor they will remain prostrate with sorrow and misery.

He addressed the lower classes thus:

Do not remain in slumber any more. Time has come, arise and see that there is no body who will speak for you. High Government Officials do not pay heed to your grievances, 'Big Men' do not care for you. Will you submit to this insult for ever? Are not you worthy 'men'? Has not God given you wisdom and intelligence? Then why would you remain steeped in ignorance and stupor. You are really the 'Big Men' of our country, don't you know that if you do not exist the country will be reduced to rack and ruin? Hence you exert, you try, so that you can gain knowledge. After that when you realise your own rights, you will act yourself, then Government will be compelled to pay heed to your demands, any tyrannical 'Big Men' will be afraid of your strength, and in the long run they will be forced to have proper regard for you.

In the real sense of the word nobody could be a truer socialist than Keshub.

Keshub laid great stress on general education. He observed: "Education will not only cultivate and improve the intellect of the nation, but also purify its character. There are many social evils and there are many prejudices; but all these will be removed, and the nation, as it moves intellectually onward, will at the same time move onward in social, political and material reformation".



During Keshub's life-time there was some move to restrict higher education by diverting some funds ear-marked for it to primary education. He strongly deprecated this move. As mentioned before, his proposal was to tax the wealthier classes for providing money for primary education. India Government used to award some State Scholarships to brilliant and qualified students for higher and specialised studies in England. For some reason or other it was prematurely withdrawn. Keshub vehemently protested against taking this step and strongly urged that these scholarships should be restored. He pointed out that Government had already promised that positions of high honour and emoluments would be thrown open to qualified Indians, and it would be fallacious if the door of higher education for Indians is closed eventually.

Keshub bitterly criticised the excise policy of Government and asked the Government: "Is not this liquor traffic carried on in India simply, solely and exclusively for the sake of revenue?" "If revenues increase in this way from the sufferings, wickedness, and demoralisation of the people, better that we should have no revenue at all". He said that there are other honest and justifiable sources of revenue which could be tackled.

Keshub and his co-workers were in the forefront of the movement for social and moral progress in the country. He established rescue homes for innocent girls after being saved from the clutches of women of evil repute and also for orphans and waifs. Keshub laid the foundation of the freedom movement in India in various ways. In England, he delivered a most remarkable lecture under the caption *England's Duties to India*. He declared: "You can not hold India for the interest of Manchester, nor for the welfare of any other community here (England), nay, for the advantage of those merchants who go to India, live as birds of passage for a time and never feel any abiding interest in the country; because they really can not do so". He also said: "Those days

are gone never to return when men thought of holding India at the point of the bayonet. If England seeks to crush down two hundred millions of people in this glorious country, to destroy their nationality, to extinguish the fire of noble antiquity and the thrill of ancient patriotism and if England's object of governing the people of India is simply to make money, then I say, *perish British Rule this moment*".

In another lecture he mentioned: "Already a transition has commenced but this is only the precursor of a mighty revolution through which India is destined to pass. Prepare yourselves, I say, for the time is coming when you shall be called to undergo heavy self-denials and encounter struggles of no ordinary kind. Be prepared to offer even your blood, if need be, for the regeneration of your country".

In another of his lectures in England Keshub told the Britishers:

I hope and trust that the merciful God who has called you to govern our nation will give you wisdom and strength, faith and purity enough to rule our race properly; if not, India will not be long in your hands. You will be forced to leave India to herself and we shall do our business in the best way we can. It is your duty so long as you hold it in your hands to act as trustees rendering due account to God for the way in which you treat the people in the country.

While in England (1870), Keshub told the Britishers that in India a wide gulf existed between their countrymen and the Indians. Capricious acts of ill-treatment, violence and even murders were committed by some of the Britishers on Indians. Keshub pleaded that those Britishers who go to India "should take with them a large quantity of that commodity known as Christian patience". Although Keshub was a great leader of social, moral, and religious reformation of India, he never advocated westernisation of his country-

men. He was every inch a nationalist, in spirit, in thought and in religion. Just before his departure from England he told his British audience: "The result of my visit to England is that I came as an Indian, I go back a confirmed Indian. I came here a theist, I return a confirmed Theist. I have learnt to love my country more and more. English patriotism has quickened my patriotism".

Many people in England at first thought that Keshub composed his lectures beforehand, committed them to memory and then delivered them. So once it was arranged that the title of the lecture which he would have to deliver would not be communicated to him beforehand but it would be announced to him just before he commenced to lecture. When Keshub came to the Lecture Hall he found a black board covered by a screen. The screen was then raised and the figure "O" was written on the black board and he was asked to lecture on "O". For an hour and a half he delivered a soul-stirring lecture on the subject which astonished everybody. His fame spread far and wide and this reacted immediately upon the national mind of India. Such achievement on the part of Keshub aroused a new race-pride and national self-respect in his own people.

Keshub believed that the freedom of our country would not have a sound basis unless our countrymen were morally and socially elevated. He once told Surendra Nath Banerjee to allow him (Keshub) to elevate Indian people morally and socially before the latter (Surendra Nath) tried for their political emancipation, so that freedom would be real and rest on a sound basis. Some of Keshub Chandra's lectures aroused indeed a new national self-consciousness and a strong desire for political emancipation in the Indian people.

Keshub Chandra was of opinion that unless the movement for political freedom be illumined by the inspiration of moral and spiritual ideas and ideals it will surely fail to fulfil its purpose and repeat in its history and evolution the fatal blunders with which similar movements of democratic freedom in other countries have been associated.

When Keshub was born, our country was not yet ripe for self-government. The Sepoy Mutiny had been quelled. It could not be successful as it was not a national movement in the real sense of the term, neither was it wide-spread. There was no national awakening at the time. Keshub fully realised that unless there is wide-spread consciousness and unless the country became morally, socially, educationally and spiritually advanced it can not attain independence. Till then England is bound to govern our country for the good of our people so that we might ultimately become fit for self-government and political freedom. His loyalty to the British Sovereign is generally misunderstood. It was necessary at that time so that our country might make steady and uninterrupted progress socially, economically, educationally and politically under a stable Government so that ultimately India might become fit to achieve freedom and independence.

About Brahmananda Keshub Chandra Sen, Bipin Chandra Pal wrote: "By his wonderful mastery over the English language, his extra-ordinary wealth of imagination, his irresistible logic, and above all, by his soul-compelling moral idealism and spiritual vision, Keshub Chandra Sen at once stood out as one of the greatest religious and ethical teachers of his age, not only in India but also outside, than whom no more powerful orator could possibly be found even in the pulpits of the whole of the English-speaking World. He was an inspired orator".

A Brahmo who professes universal religion should have an international outlook in addition to his nationalistic outlook. Brahmananda Keshub Chandra was at once national and international in his outlook. The principles enunciated in the constitution of United Nations Organisation or in Bandung *Panchsila* are natural corollaries of the teachings of Raja Rammohan Roy, Brahmananda Keshub Chandra Sen, Poet Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Arabindo. If their teachings as revealed in their conception of universal religion are widely accepted and followed, then and then only there can be lasting peace all over the world.

Vice-Chancellor Reynolds spoke on Keshub Chandra Sen at the Calcutta University Convocation in 1884 just after his demise thus: "This country has produced, in the present century, a man cast in a very similar mould (mould of Sakyamuni the greatest man this country has ever produced), a man who has lived and worked among us, whose features were familiar to us all and whose words are still fresh in the memory of many who are present to-day. I will not attempt to determine the exact range which history will assign to Keshub Chandra Sen in the noble band of thinkers, reformers, and philanthropists. The full measure of his greatness the present generation are perhaps unable to appreciate, just as a traveller standing at some mountain's foot, can not truly estimate the height of the eminence which towers above him". "The life of Keshub Chandra Sen is a pledge and an assurance that Providence has yet a great destiny in store for this land". "It remains for you the students of this generation to follow in his footsteps, to complete his work, to show yourselves worthy to be called his fellow-countrymen".

Keshub Chandra was the first national leader who announced publicly in the sixties of the last century that Hindi should be the national language of India. He also advised Swami Dayananda Saraswati (the founder of Arya Samaj) to adopt Hindi as the medium of preaching so that his (Swami's) message might reach the largest number of people in India. He (Keshub) was also the pioneer in starting the Depressed Class Movement which was the precursor of Mahatma Gandhi's Harijan Movement.

Keshub deplored Europe's haughty civilization whose desperate onslaughts had "brought sorrow into her heart, ignominy on her fair name and death to her cherished institutions". He extolled India's "cosmopolitan, catholic and comprehensive spirit". He pleaded for "Unity in variety". He preached: "Let all sects retain their distinctive peculiarities, and yet let them unite in fraternal alliance".

Here was the idea of a true 'United Nations' Organisation' the full impact of which the power-intoxicated nations of the world have not yet realised. Keshub, the inspired prophet of the Indian Renaissance, discovered that the Secret of World Peace lies in the eternal laws of fellowship, understanding, justice and equity.

## 9

### SRI RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHANSA

(1836-1886)

*Amiya Kumar Mazumdar*

Born of Brahmin parents in February 1836 amidst the utter simplicity of a village of Bengal, Gadadhar Chattopadhyay, later known as Ramakrishna, found himself drawn to a religious life from his boyhood. At the age of twenty he became the chief priest at the temple of Dakshineswar founded by Rani Rasmani, a rich lady of Calcutta belonging to an inferior caste. The environment of the temple deeply influenced Ramakrishna's life and personality. The central temple at Dakshineswar was that of Kali, the Divine Mother. In a separate temple within the same compound there was the image of Krishna, symbolizing divine love and beauty, and each of the twelve temples along the Ganga was adorned by the image of Siva, the absolute. The awful and yet lovely goddess of the Tantrikas, the divine flute-player of the Vaishnavas, and the self-immersed transcendent Lord of the Saivas lived together before the eyes of Ramakrishna, representing so many ideals of Hindu devotees.

Ramakrishna was no scholar, he had no aristocratic dignity either of birth or wealth, nor did he possess any power or prestige in the conventional sense of the terms. Yet he possessed the power of attracting to himself great intellectuals and leaders of thought of his time—Keshabchandra Sen,

Pandit Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Pratapchandra Majumdar amongst others. The latter, one of the most devoted followers of Keshabchandra Sen, was struck and bewildered by the influence which Ramakrishna exercised over educated men. "What is there in common between him and me?" he asked, "I a Europeanised, civilised, self-centered, semi-sceptical, so-called educated reasoner, and he, a poor, illiterate, unpolished, half-idolatrous, friendless Hindu devotee? Why should I sit long hours to attend to him, I who have listened to Disraeli and Fawcett, Stanley and Max Muller and a whole host of European scholars and divines? And it is not I only, but dozens like me who do the same". Keshabchandra felt that Ramakrishna's source of strength was his spiritual life which was unique in character: "He worships Shiva, he worships Kali, he worships Rama, he worships Krishna, and is a confirmed advocate of Vedantic doctrines. . . . He is an idolator, yet is a faithful and most devoted mediator of the perfections of the One formless, infinite Deity. His religion means ecstasy, his worship means transcendental insight, his whole nature burns day and night with a permanent fire and fever of a strange faith and feeling".

Ramakrishna was no ordinary priest carrying on the routine work at the temple of Dakshineswar. He was a god-intoxicated man. He had a yearning for a direct realisation of divinity. And the separation between the devotee and his object of worship became intolerable. One day, unable to bear the painful separation any longer he resolved to put an end to his life when suddenly he was blessed with divine grace. He described the vision himself:

"One day I was torn with intolerable anguish. My heart seemed to be wrung as a damp cloth might be wrung. I was racked with pain. A terrible frenzy seized me at the thought that I might never be granted the blessing of this Divine vision. I thought if that were so, then enough of this life. A sword was hanging in the sanctuary of Kali. My eyes fell



upon it and an idea flashed through my brain like a flash of lightning. 'The sword It will help me to end it'. I rushed up to it, and seized it like a mad man. And lo the whole scene, doors, windows, the temple itself vanished.... It seemed as if nothing existed any more. Instead I saw an ocean of spirit, boundless, dazzling. In whatever direction I turned great luminous waves were rising. They bore down upon me with a loud roar, as if to swallow me up. In an instant they were upon me. They broke over me, they engulfed me. I was suffocated. I lost consciousness and I fell. How I passed that day and the next I do not know. Round me rolled an ocean of ineffable joy. And in the depths of my being I was conscious of the presence of the Divine Mother".

Ramakrishna had two spiritual guides in his life—Bhairavi Brahmani and Tota Puri. Bhairavi, a lady ascetic of Tantrika school who was born of a Brahmin family of East Bengal, came to know through *yogic* power that there were three great personages in Bengal to all of whom she was to deliver a certain message. Two such personages she had already met before and the third was Ramakrishna. When Ramakrishna told Bhairavi that people used to call him mad on account of the fact that his actions differed widely from those of the common man, the lady ascetic assured him saying that the state through which Ramakrishna was passing was not a state of insanity but was *Mahabhava*, an extra-ordinary state of religious ecstasy mentioned in books of *Bhakti* attended with nineteen external characteristics such as shedding tears, tremor of body, standing of hair on end, perspiration etc.

Ramakrishna practised all the different forms of Tantrika *sadhana* and was subsequently attracted towards Vaishnavism. Not only did he practice different forms of Vaishnava *sadhana*, he even realised the different spiritual experiences as a Christian and also as a Moslem. As a result of his practising all the spiritual exercises mentioned in the sixty-four

principal Tantras, Ramakrishna became overwhelmed with divine fervour and used to fall into deep trances; he had direct realisation of numerous gods and goddesses described in the scripture. The Bhairavi was amazed to see that the physical symptoms resulting from Ramakrishna's ecstatic love for God were analogous to the ecstatic moods of Sri Radha and Sri Chaitanya.

Towards the end of 1864 Ramakrishna came in contact with Tota Puri, an extra-ordinary Vedantic ascetic, a wandering monk whom Ramakrishna accepted as his spiritual guide. Tota Puri taught Ramakrishna to detach his mind from everything earthly and plunge it into the heart of the *Atman*. In spite of his best efforts Ramakrishna could not cross the realm of name and form nor could he concentrate on the precepts of the *Advaita Vedanta*. Everytime the familiar form of the radiant Mother appeared before him as a living reality. Tota Puri was exasperated and one day he struck the point between Ramakrishna's eyes with a piece of broken glass and commanded him sternly to concentrate his mind on that point. Ramakrishna made another attempt and the last barrier disappeared. He was immersed in the depths of *nirvikalpa samadhi*, indeterminate realisation of the Formless One, wherein subject, object and process of cognition disappeared. The Universe was extinguished.

Ramakrishna had a natural aversion to all kinds of dogmatism and bookishness. The important thing is, he used to say, somehow to cultivate devotion to God and love for him. It is no use reading too many books and storing the mind with detailed opinions and discussions. When one enters an orchard to eat mangoes, he said, one must enjoy eating to one's heart's content. It is foolish to count leaves and branches on the trees rather than eat the mangoes.

Ramakrishna's attitude to *sadhana* had a realistic basis. He used to say that the modern man had hardly sufficient time and energy to go through the elaborate rites and

rituals prescribed in the scripture. Thousands of lectures based on the scripture can no more make the slightest impression on worldly people than one can drive a nail into a stone wall or strike through the skin of the crocodile with a sword. It would be wrong to suppose, however, that Ramakrishna discarded religious rites altogether; what he insisted on was simplicity of practice and not meaningless jargons of an unintelligent devotee. As he put it, it is wise to follow the simple but effective attitude of Hanumana—"I do not know the day of the week, the phase of the moon or the position of the stars; I only contemplate Rama". One cannot however give up rituals altogether unless one realises God. Ritualistic worship comes to an end when the devotee's eyes become filled with tears as one repeats *Om Rama*. It is then that the necessity of repeating rituals or muttering beads is no longer felt. When the fruit appears the blossom drops off. Love of God is the fruit and rituals are the blossom.

Though he was not a scholar in the traditional sense of the term, Ramakrishna's life is an eloquent testimony to the true spirit of scholasticism. Scholarship does not consist in scanning scriptural texts, its object is not the book but the man. True scholarship is transformed life and Ramakrishna showed how the life divine could be lived.

The most remarkable feature of Ramakrishna's teaching is that he never formulated a well-defined and precise type of religion nor did he preach one. He did not form any sect and yet he attracted great intellectuals of diverse faiths. This was because religion was with him a living dynamic faith. On one occasion on hearing a man singing the verse: "Think of Him and worship Him at every instant of the day", Ramakrishna stopped the singer and said "you should alter the verse into 'Pray to Him and worship Him only twice a day!' Say what you really do. Why tell fibs to the Infinite?" On another occasion Ramakrishna heard a devotee in prayer enumerating all the perfections of the Lord,

whereupon he asked: "Why do you give these statistics? Does a son say to his father: 'O my father, you possess so many houses, so many gardens, so many horses, etc'...? It is natural for a father to put his resources at the disposal of his son. If you think of Him and His gifts as something extra-ordinary, you can never be intimate with Him, you cannot draw near to Him. Do think of Him as your nearest. Then He will reveal Himself to you. Do you not see that if you go into an ecstasy over His attributes, you become an idolator?"

To those who avowedly protest against idolatry and over-zealously insist on worshipping the formless God, Ramakrishna's answers are clear and decisive: "God is with form and without form. Images and other symbols are just as valid as your attributes. And these attributes are not different from idolatry, but are merely hard and petrified forms of it." "Again," he said: "You wish to be strict and partial. For myself I have a burning desire to worship the Lord in as many ways as I can; nevertheless my heart's desire has never been satisfied. I long to worship with offerings of flowers and fruits, to repeat His Holy name in solitude, to meditate upon Him, to sing His hymns, to dance in the joy of the Lord. Those who believe that God is without form attain Him just as well as those who believe He has form. The only two essentials are faith and self-surrender".

These words can not be said to have fallen from the lips of a commentator of scriptural texts, nor from a theological disputant. They reflect the living certitude of a seer. For with Ramakrishna words were not ornamental robes hiding the true form of a person but like flowers they blossomed forth from the inmost recess of his soul. As he spoke he lost himself in God, like a bather who dives and reappears dripping after a moment, bringing with him the smell of seaweed, the taste of the salt of the ocean.

Ramakrishna did not dissent from the monistic explanation of the universe. Yet his temperament which has full

of feminine tenderness and grace forced him to lay far greater stress on the personal aspect of God. The absolute of the *Advaitin* could be realised by only the perfect *samadhi*. But then the Indeterminate Absolute was not basically different from the Personal God. The two are but different aspects of the same Reality. There may be a distinction without difference which is analogous to the distinction between ice and water. Ice is frozen water and when the heat of the sun is applied to ice it melts into water. The sun gives the radiance of knowledge and ice is the concrete product of penetrating devotion. Like the *Akasa*, *Brahman* is without any modification. It has become manifold because of *Sakti*. Again, *Brahman* is like fire which itself has no colour. The fire appears white if you throw a white substance into it, red if you throw a red. What *Brahman* is cannot be described; it is beyond words.

Yet Ramakrishna would not allow any dualism between *Brahman* and *Sakti*. According to him, He who is *Purusha* is also *Prakriti*. He who is *Brahman* is also *Sakti*. He is called *Purusha* or *Brahman* when He is inactive, that is to say, when He ceases to create, preserve or destroy; and He is called *Sakti* or *Prakriti* when He engages in those activities. The Personal and the Impersonal are the same Being in the same way as milk and its whiteness or the diamond and its lustre or the serpent and its undulations. That which is beyond both *Kshara* and *Akshara* cannot be described.

Ramakrishna's saying remind one of the teachings of the Lord Krishna about *Purushottama*: There are two *Purushas* in the world—the Perishable and the Imperishable. All beings are the perishable and the Immutable is called the Imperishable. But, there is another, the Supreme *Purusha* called the Highest Self, the Immutable Lord who pervades the three worlds and sustains them.

It is reassuring to see that, in an age of renaissance and enlightenment, Ramakrishna's utterances which were a testimony to Supreme Truth went straight into the heart of

humanity and helped the seeker after truth in putting an end to all controversy and antagonism that prevailed amongst philosophical and theological systems. Ramakrishna regarded different religious paths as but different ways leading to the same goal. Water is the same no matter whether one uses the term *jal* or *pani* or *aqua* to describe it. One can reach the roof of a house by scaling a wall or with the help of a ladder or with the help of a rope, or by climbing the stairs. But once the roof is reached, the means no longer appear to have any importance.

To Ramakrishna dualism and qualified non-dualism were not sharply opposed and exclusive ways of realization of Truth but rather different steps leading to the same goal. They are not contradictory but rather are complementary, the one to the other. One path may be considered suitable for an individual aspirant of one particular mental make-up while another path may be suitable to a person of a different mental order. For an ordinary devotee, who does not possess much scholarship, the dualistic form of religion with rituals, images and symbols may be useful. The intellectual seeker after Truth can arrive at qualified non-dualism according to his fitness. And the Absolute non-dualistic *Advaita sadhana* is given only to those who have attained fitness of a rare order through the discipline of *yoga*. It transcends all limits of ratiocination and brings about an identity of the Self and the Absolute. Here again Ramakrishna sounds a note of warning. Man cannot pretend to know which particular path will suit him. It is the Divine Mother who alone knows which particular path will be suitable for her child. A mother who has five children serves different kinds of dishes according to the appetite and capacity of each of her children. But that does not mean that the mother is partial or indifferent. Similar are the ways of the Divine Mother.

Ramakrishna did not however propose a sort of synthesis of religious systems. Nor did he preach any universal

religion as an eclectic form inter-relating the basic elements of different faiths. Religion is not to be likened to a flower vase which contains flowers of different species and colours plucked from various plants. Ramakrishna would not say that there are inklings of Truth in different historical religions. Rather he used to say that every religion is wholly true. For Truth is one and indivisible, and as such it would be improper to say that different religions contained fragments of Truth. Ramakrishna was fully alive to the significance of the force of religion as a dynamic, living faith; religion is for him the very essence of man. Just as a man cannot live without breathing so he cannot live without religion which forms the very bed-rock of his existence. Because God is Truth and Truth is God, no fragmentation of Divinity is possible. The example of the bird which Ramakrishna loved to cite to his audience is a significant one. Two persons quarrelled over the real colour of a bird which both of them noticed in a garden. One said the bird was red while the other said it was blue. Each pressed his own point and no conclusion was reached. At last they approached the gardener for a solution of the controversy. The gardener who knew the bird for a long time said that it was both red and blue, and it had other colours as well for it was a many-coloured bird (*Bahurupi*). From one angle of vision it appeared blue while from another angle it looked red. All the colours were equally true. Ramakrishna looked upon religion in the same way. Different religions are but different approaches to God. He would not say that out of the various colours of the bird a new synthetic colour emerged. So he would never say that some sort of a universal religion was the outcome of a synthesis of different religious systems.

Ramakrishna had a firm faith in *Advaitism* as he had faith in other forms of religion and philosophy. Yet he had a special fascination for the Personal God. "As a rule", he declared, "the devotee does not long for the realisation of the Impersonal. He is anxious that the whole of his ego

should not be effaced in *samadhi*. The devotee would fain have sufficient individuality left to him to enjoy the Vision Divine as a person. He would fain taste sugar in place of being one with the sugar itself". He did not however look upon the phenomenal world as illusion. He spoke of involution and evolution. It is the process of evolution and involution. The world after its dissolution remains involved in God, and God, at the time of creation, evolves as the world. Butter goes with buttermilk and buttermilk goes with butter. If the Self exists then the non-self must also exist. To the question how can such a God be known by the ordinary man Ramakrishna answered that through the company of holy men and repeating the name of God with sincere devotion one can have taste of Divinity. He once prayed to the Mother: "Mother I don't seek knowledge. Here, take Thy knowledge, take Thy ignorance Give me only pure love for Thy lotus feet".

On one occasion Ramakrishna was heard exclaiming in a state of trance: "yes, my Holy Mother (Kali) is none other than the Absolute. She it is to whom the six systems of philosophy with all their learned disquisitions furnish no clue". When however a man returns from *samadhi*, he is thrown back upon the world of reality and perceives the world-system as real because he becomes a differentiated ego once more. So long as a man's ego is real, the world is real too. At this stage the question of the Absolute does not arise. God cannot be known by the sense-organs or by this mind, but He can be known by pure mind, the mind that is free from worldly desires. Yet it is well to bear in mind that one cannot pour four seers of milk into a one-seer pot. We can never know God unless He lets us know Him.

Let us not assume for a moment that there is a note of despair in this utterance of Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna gave to humanity a message of hope and a vision which are too precious to be forgotten. Will every human being



realise God one day or other? Ramakrishna gave a categorical and affirmative answer to this question. Normally a man does not keep himself starving throughout the day; some take meal in the morning, some at noontime while some others in the evening. So also God is sure to reveal Himself to every man, may be at different periods of time.

The realisation of God enabled Ramakrishna to evaluate the divinity of man in a measure hitherto unknown. Addressing Narendranath and some other disciples, Ramakrishna said one day: "They talk of mercy to the creatures. How audacious it is to think of showering mercy on the Jiva, who is none other than Siva. One has to regard the creature as God Himself and proceed to serve it with a devout heart, instead of taking up the pose of doling out mercy". Certainly it would be sacrilegious to accord a more elevating position to the so-called helper in relation to the toiling mass. The worship of suffering humanity as embodiment of God is in itself a programme of spiritual practice which, if observed with selfless devotion and love, can lead one to the goal of God-realisation. Ramakrishna's outlook in this respect was far more radical than the Buddhistic or the Christian outlook. Since Buddhism does not believe in worshipping God in any definite form, love of man amounts to a mere code of right conduct while the Christian maxim 'Love thy neighbour as thyself' does not mean more than what it literally conveys. In the attitude of Ramakrishna, however, 'Self' means 'God'. The *Advaita sadhana* prescribes that one should realise one's own self in others and it is the surest way of removing hatred between man and man and suffusing the entire creation with love.

Men are only outwardly different from one another. They are like pillow-cases, one is white while the other is brown but each one of them contains the same kind of cotton. Some men appear to be ugly while others beautiful; some are good while others are bad but all men are basically manifestations of God.

True religion, far from fostering inaction and escapism transforms all work and service into so many forms of informing spirit. On one occasion when Narendranath had tasted the bliss of *nirvikalpa samadhi*, the highest realisation, and implored his Master to allow him to remain in that blissful state indefinitely, Ramakrishna sharply rebuked him saying: "For shame! How can you ask such things? I thought you were a vast receptacle of life, and here you wish to stay absorbed in personal joy like an ordinary man. This realisation will become so natural to you, by the grace of the Mother, that in your normal state you will realise the One Divinity in all beings; you will bring spiritual consciousness to men and assuage the misery of the humble and the poor." History shows how this prediction came out true.

According to Ramakrishna, renunciation of the world is not an indispensable condition for realising God. A householder can realise God provided he can develop the amount of concentration and the intensity of love necessary for the task. One can remain in the world without being of the world. There is nothing wrong in the life of the householder as such. The householder who can merge himself in the life of God and yet perform the duties of a householder in a detached manner is in a great measure superior to a *sannyasin* or monk who has renounced the world. The householder may have a firm ground to walk upon if he spends some time in solitude and attains knowledge. Janaka lived in the world after attaining knowledge. Ramakrishna used to compare detached householders fit for God-realisation to those women who would carry pitchers full of water on their heads and yet walk on gossiping, taking care all the while that the pitchers might not fall to the ground. If one has developed a spirit of absolute surrender to God, it does not matter whether one leads the life of a householder or not.

Sceptical people might look askance at Ramakrishna's experiments with truth. In his own time there were some great intellectuals like Isvarchandra Vidyasagar and Sivanath

Sastri who did not see eye to eye with Ramakrishna in so far as the whole gamut of the spiritual life of Ramakrishna was concerned. To Sivānath Sastri's suggestion that one loses one's head by thinking too much of God, Ramakrishna replied: Can anyone ever become unconscious by thinking of consciousness? God is of the nature of Eternity, Purity and Consciousness. Through His consciousness one becomes conscious of everything; through His intelligence the whole world appears intelligent. There is, of course, a line in a song: 'Divine fervour fills my body and robs me of consciousness'. The consciousness referred to here is the consciousness of the outer world.

It has been a fashion now-a-days to say that we are living in an age of science and we must develop a scientific attitude in all matters relating to men and events. Science has attained an extraordinary prestige in the popular mind and whatever has the semblance of a scientific character commands respect which is almost blind. The modern man's reverence for science is sometimes followed by a corresponding loss of faith and religion. There is a conviction that all valid knowledge can be obtained only through the scientific method. The result of all this has been a blind devotion to logical positivism as the only possible philosophy for the scientist. Logical positivism rejects all metaphysical and religious propositions as meaningless for the simple reason that they cannot be verified by sense experience, actual or possible. If however faith in God is to be rejected, if faith in an order of nature is to be rejected, what earthly reason is there to suppose that only faith in logical positivism cannot be rejected?

It would be futile to assert that science can be all-inclusive. Science represents an attempt to co-ordinate our experience but it is experience of a particular kind. It is only in the field of mechanistic measurement that science can hold its own. But there are other domains of experience where mechanical operation has no entrance. The old teaching of

Plato that there must be a resemblance between the knower and the known is too precious to be thrown away. The 'logos' in us must be akin to the 'logos' of things. And this is eminently valid for the understanding of religion. A love-letter may appear meaningless and silly to one who has never fallen in love but that does not justify him in rejecting the value a love-letter has to a lover.

It is time that we called attention to the insight of seers that since truth is one, the cosmos is one, ultimately knowledge also must be one.

It is well to remind ourselves of the lessons of the *Mundaka Upanishad* that there are two types of knowledge: one the supreme, *para* and the other the ordinary, relative, *apara*. All the temporal knowledge—sciences, literature and arts including the knowledge contained in the sacred Vedas was relegated by the Upanishad to the category of the ordinary or *apara* knowledge. That alone is *para* or supreme knowledge which helps destroy spiritual blindness and reveal the ever present spiritual reality behind man and nature. Again, in the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* we have the unmistakable categorical assertion that not through technological advances but through the knowledge of God alone shall mankind attain peace and happiness.

It is in this field that Sri Ramakrishna has a message of lasting value for the modern man. He stripped religion of its theological and sacerdotal garments and made it co-eval with life. From the artificial domain of theory so long contained in dead point, Ramakrishna rescued religion and gave it a new connotation. He felt that there should be a marriage between the lofty spiritual height and the plains of the phenomenal world. Spirit without matter is empty, matter without spirit is blind. The modern man is groping in the dark because he is lacking in the power of the informing spirit. Ramakrishna restored the lost spirit and thereby made man conscious of his heritage, dignity and responsibility.

## 10

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA.

(1863-1902)

*Atindra Nath Bose*

In 1863, on the twelfth of January was born in Calcutta Narendranath Datta, later known as Swami Vivekananda, without whom India would not have been what she is now. May be, to fulfil Macaulay's dream, she would have been possessed of boys black in face, reading Shakespeare and Milton and pluming themselves in English literature. It was Rammohan Roy who stemmed the tide of cultural metamorphosis and started a phase of intellectual renaissance. But his was a voice of genius which reached the intellect of a few. Vivekananda's was the voice of the soul. It went into the heart of the nation and restored it firmly on its feet.

### *The Precursors*

Rammohan brought a new spirit,—the spirit of accepting or rejecting anything after searching criticism, and combined with it a reverence for the past and large-hearted human sympathy. Fighting against religious and social bigotry all around, recovering the ancient heritage which was lost to a blinded orthodoxy, he gave the start to all the principal movements of the century. But the sudden rush of rationalism and intellectual freedom produced an inevitable reaction. Young Bengal was swept off its feet. Old inhibitions

getting loose, liberty ran into licence. As a counterpoise to the furious scepticism which was rampant among the elite, Keshabchandra brought the restraint of the sublime passion of the divine. Narendranath was attracted by his forceful personality and joined the Brahmo Samaj. The young sceptic found no intellectual satisfaction in the teacher who was assuming the role of a mystical prophet himself. At this time, still a lad in his teens, he came into contact with the Saint of Dakshineswar and found his moorings.

Vivekananda and his master Ramakrishna together make one complete personality. Ramakrishna rose to the supreme heights of mystical realisation through the diverse paths of Tantrika, Advaitic, Islamic and Christian practices and bequeathed his power to the favourite disciple. He was not happy with his own realisation. It called for active fulfilment in the service of man. Thrown into the world with this sacred burden the disciple became the dynamic counterpart of the master, the positive complement of the mystic. An arrogant scoffer, nurtured in the scepticism of Hume and Spencer, he was tamed by the ecstatic visionary and loaded with his commission, tramped from Kashmir to Colombo with tears in his eyes and fire in his heart. He died young and his active life was hardly a decade. But before that he had spread his fire amongst the youth and taught them "that their lives are dedicated to their motherland".

### *Conquest of the West*

Ramakrishna died in 1886. Narendranath had completed the course of law but did not sit for the examination. He burnt his boats and went to live with fellow disciples holding them together for the mission of the Master. In 1888 he left them and with a staff and a bowl set out on a pilgrimage over the country. He saw the spiritual unity of India and learnt it from the book of life. Men from all strata of society flocked around him drawn by his erudition, eloquence, spiritual fervour and magnetic personality. After five years

of wandering he crossed the seas with the money collected by his disciples by begging from door to door,<sup>1</sup> and after untold hardship attended the famous parliament of religions at Chicago (1893). There he did not represent a sect or a creed. He spoke on India's spirituality in which all religions are united. He spoke not in a tone of submission and apology but with a refreshing boldness and confidence which were unknown of India's spokesmen. The effect was spectacular. The unknown monk stormed the American mind. His name and message spread far and wide and the resonance of his voice wafted into India. When he returned to the country he was given the reception of a triumphant hero and the ochre-robed Swami at once became the prophet of the Indian youth. He paid a second visit to America and Europe in 1899 and returned towards the close of the year.

Yet it was not a facile victory. There was deep-seated colour prejudice in America which was not easily overcome. With his black skin and the stigma of a subject race he had to face disgrace and ridicule and he was maligned by jealous clergymen. At home, orthodox Brahmans were furious at the Sudra dabbling in the *Sastras* and he was execrated for crossing the 'black waters'. The Theosophists and Christian missionaries joined in the campaign of hatred. But all this furore calmed down before the mighty wheel which he had set rolling.

Wherefrom did the 'cyclonic Hindoo' draw the strength that, standing alone between a speck of shy intelligentsia and a mass of slumbering illiterates, he startled the world and galvanised his country? It was the philosophy he realised and lived which gave him the strength to conquer. His social philosophy was a direct outcome of his spiritual realisation.

### *Message of the Vedanta*

The message of the Vedanta is a synthesis of diversities. Standing on the principle of relativity of truth, it holds that truth is relative to the condition of the observer, that God can

be worshipped and obtained in form and in the formless to suit the qualities of the devotee, that religions are like languages conveying the same truth in different manner. Vivekananda sought to unite the various sects of India under the banner of this philosophy. He wanted "an Islamic body with a Vedantic heart". Against the caste-ridden hierarchy of moribund Hindu society he would have the equalitarian social policy of Islam containing within it the spiritual catholicism of the Vedanta which sees the same One expressed in different faiths.

He wanted to actualise this philosophy. "The abstract Advaita must become living—poetic in everyday life". The sense of oneness in diversity must lead to concrete moral forms, "the most scientific and practical psychology".<sup>2</sup> This will lift the genius of the race from the morass of barren speculation. The psychological and moral transformation is the prerequisite of all other reforms. In the lecture delivered in Madras on his return from the West on 'My Plan of Campaign', he said:

Every improvement in India requires first of all an upheaval in religion. Before flooding India with socialistic or political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ideas.<sup>3</sup>

Spiritual revolution did not mean flight from material life or covering the land with monasteries. Spirituality is the attainment of moral personality through expansion of the soul. For building a new India the primary thing is the human material, a strong and loving character. This arises from the divinity in man, the essential spirituality of life and is necessary for a great mission. A band of devoted missionaries will conquer the world with India's spiritual ideas and inject new life into the torpid veins. There is no reason to be supplicant towards the West.

The whole of Western civilisation will crumble to pieces in the next fifty years if there is no spiritual



foundation. It is hopeless and perfectly useless to attempt to govern mankind with the sword.<sup>4</sup>

### *Roots of Patriotism*

This robust self-confidence, faith in India's spiritual power is the *elan* of Vivekananda's burning patriotism. "The soil of India is my highest heaven," said he. The nation is his God, service to the nation his religion.

For the next fifty years this alone shall be our keynote—this, our great Mother India. Let all other vain Gods disappear for that time from our minds. This is the only God that is awake, our own race, everywhere His hands, everywhere His feet, everywhere His ears, He covers everything.<sup>5</sup>

From his ringing voice came the soul-stirring words of the *Katha Upanishad*: "Arise, awake, realise the felicity that is yours by right." He turned the mind of the race to the Upanishads. "Therein lies strength enough to invigorate the whole world". "This soul is not for the weak", says the gospel of power (*Mundaka Upanishad*). Mastery of matter, mastery of life and mastery of mind are successive stages through which the seeker must travel before the goal of the Absolute is reached. The calls aroused the sleeping Leviathan. The dormant and moribund Hinduism was on the march again. It came down from speculative abstractions to the positive values of life. His language would even beat a Feuerbach in its terseness: "I do not believe in a God who cannot give me bread here, giving me eternal bliss in heaven".<sup>6</sup> A religion has no use for him unless it gives the confidence and strength which can relieve the misery all around.

So the Vedanta did not send him to the Himalayas or to the salvation of the unbroken *samadhi*. It taught him to squarely face the reality which is one eternal Self. On the empirical plane this principle means that self *qua* self has no difference and that one individual is no more important

in the realm of reality than another. It was a pity that India had lost this supreme doctrine of equality and made the cooking pot her God and 'don't touchism' her religion. The Vedantic equality must be translated into practical life.

### *Sudras Have the Future*

Where is the country, his 'highest heaven'? Who are the nation, his 'only God'? Not "a few hundred modernised half-educated and denationalised men" who are "all the show of modern English India".<sup>7</sup> The vitality of the race was not in the upper classes but in the masses who work and produce. He inveighs against the former.

Do you think you are alive? You are but mummies ten thousand years old! It is among those whom your ancestors despised as 'walking carrions' that the little vitality there is still in India is to be found; and it is you who are the real 'walking corpses'.<sup>8</sup>

Vivekananda had a clear insight into the dichotomy of the classes and the rising social power of the oppressed and the down-trodden. He frankly averred that he was a socialist. The masses are the real body of society. The Brahmana, the Kshatriya and the Vaishya all derive their fortune and position from the physical labour of the Sudras. "It is they who have introduced civilization among us and we call them base-born". If they are left degraded they will drag down the rest and the country will fall like a house of cards. But this was not to be. With unerring foresight he saw that the future was with them.

Human society is in turn governed by the four castes, the priests, the soldiers, the traders and the labourers.....The first three have had their day. Now is the time for the last,—they must have it—none can resist it.<sup>9</sup>

This was said more than sixty years ago when Lenin was an unknown exile and Russia was under the heels of the Tsar.

The Mother is the soul of the nation, the goddess of the teeming millions rising from her aconic slumber.

Let her arise—out of the peasants' cottage, grasping the plough, out of the huts of the fisherman, the cobbler and the sweeper. Let her spring from the grocer's shop, from beside the oven of the fritter-seller. Let her emanate from the factory, from marts and from markets. Let her emerge from the groves and forests, from hills and mountains.<sup>10</sup>

Vivekananda was twenty years ahead of his time in sending this call for the masses. A nation cannot rise leaving the bulk of it in poverty and degradation. When his voice wandered in vain he sent his brethren to serve the *pariahs* and himself went to stay with them. He pined and chafed to organise the youth and to "send them like irresistible waves over India, bringing comfort, morality, religion, education to the doors of the meanest and the most down-trodden."<sup>11</sup>

### *The Path*

But without the least vanity and pretension. The service of the Vedantist missionary is the service of worship. For to serve man is to serve God. To his disciples he cited the example of the Maharashtrian mother who ran a school for girls and believed that she was serving Uma in the Kumari: "These blessed ones I worship and they will take me to salvation".<sup>12</sup>

How to raise the masses into self-conscious activity? The idea of a national revolution was a fantastic dream. The country was dead. The people were not ready for even a show of resistance. Vivekananda saw the futility of politics. He admitted that in the Indian National Congress "a nation is be-

ing made out of India's different races".<sup>13</sup> But its leaders lacked faith in the country's destiny. They could not stretch their eyes beyond the British Empire. Vivekananda abhorred the politics of beggary which made the foreign masters laugh. He knew further that those who were begging for liberty were not ready to share it with others.

Suppose the English gave over to you all the power. Why, the powers that be, then, will hold the people down, and let them not have it. Slaves want power to make slaves.<sup>14</sup>

The masses must build up their own future. For this the thing of utmost necessity is education. Education creates faith in one's own self, and from faith in one's own self, wakes up the dormant Brahman within. This is the task of a band of devoted missionaries who will travel from door to door and educate the masses regarding them as their God.

So in 1897 was founded the Ramakrishna Mission and the Ramakrishna Monastery (*Math*). The *Math* is the school where the monk realises the truth and the Mission is the vow of service to which he is dedicated.

He is a *karmayogin* who acts as the agent of God. For him the command is:

Do not fly away from the wheels of the world machine, but stand inside it and learn the secret of work.<sup>15</sup>

### *A Hindu Revivalist?*

Vivekananda had to face the attack not only of orthodox Hindus but also of sceptics and secular nationalists who denounced him as a Hindu revivalist with a nostalgic faith in the past. The former attack came during his lifetime and the latter was made after his death. These critics fail to note that while Vivekananda freed India's intellect from the hypnosis of foreign culture, it was he who also broke India's isolation from the rest of the world. He welcomed the spi-

rit of freedom and action, the cheerful vitality and scientific progress which are the contributions of the West.

What we should have is, what we have not, perhaps what our fore-fathers even had not;—that which the Yavanas had;—that, impelled by the life-vibration of which, is issuing forth in rapid succession from the great dynamo of Europe, the electric flow of that tremendous power, vivifying the whole world.... We want that energy, that love of independence, that spirit of self-reliance, that immovable fortitude, that dexterity in action, that bond of unity of purpose, that thirst for improvement. Checking a little the constant looking back to the past, we want that expansive vision infinitely projected forward; and we want,—that intense spirit of activity (Rajas) which will flow through our every vein, from head to foot.<sup>16</sup>

Vivekananda was no believer in secular nationalism. As a Vedantist he was a Hindu and his appeal worked mainly upon the youthful idealism of the Hindus. Hence he is accused of turning the tide of nationalist movement to sectarian channels and thus being responsible for the dangerous rift which culminated in the two-nation theory and the partition of India. It is true that he did not try to unify the nation by means of an eclectic doctrine or by a patchwork of creeds. Time has proved that communal discords cannot be pacified by such patchworks or by political tactics. The force for unity must be raised from the latent spirituality of man. Once this spirituality is kindled, it will transcend religious creeds. This is the teaching of the Vedanta which was lost to the sectarian Hindus and which Vivekananda exhorted mankind to relearn.

### *Liberalism and Rationalism*

He was no proselyte. The unity of spirit does not call for a conversion of faith. Innumerable are the ways of reaching

the goal and so every one is free to have his own path. No path is wrong. "Man never progresses from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lesser truth to higher truth". Vivekananda was not for mere *toleration* of *other* faiths. He was for *acceptance* of *all* faiths. Neither his religion nor his nationalism was of the aggressive chauvinistic type. He was happy that India, throughout her long history, was never an aggressor on others' spheres. All her conquests were the conquests of love. He would say with Socrates, "To do wrong is worse than to suffer wrong". For the consequence of suffering wrong is external and does not hurt the soul. India had suffered for centuries in the hands of others but she did not do any wrong to any. So her soul remains uncorrupted, she retains her vitality and the competence to carry the mission of the Spirit.

The truth of the Vedanta emerges out of the conflict and synthesis of ideas. It is not a closed system hardened into a set of dogma. It is a rational system with its doors wide open to receive new and foreign ideas.

It is better that mankind should become atheist by following reason than blindly believe in two hundred millions of gods on the authority of anybody.<sup>17</sup>

There is no essential difference between science and religion. The aim of both is knowledge and power which help us to be free. The work of both is struggle.

Man is man, so long as he is struggling to rise above nature and this nature is both internal and external. Not only does it comprise the laws that govern the particles of matter outside us and in our bodies, but also the more subtle nature within, which is, in fact, the motive power governing the external. It is good and very grand to conquer external nature, but grander still to conquer our internal nature. It is grand and good to know the laws that

govern the stars and planets; it is infinitely grander and better to know the laws that govern the passions, the feelings, the will, of mankind. This conquering of the inner man, . . . belong entirely to religion.<sup>18</sup>

### *Discipline of Facts*

The social philosophy of the Vedanta accepts the stern discipline of facts. Vivekananda had a strong disdain for miracles. Vedanta has no place for the so-called supernatural. If anything did happen which appeared to be out of nature's way, it only showed the imperfection of our knowledge of nature. He roundly denounced priestcraft and religious tyranny. On the other hand, he hailed the materialism of the West as India's deliverer.

Materialism has come to the rescue of India in a certain sense, by throwing open the doors of life to everyone, by destroying the exclusive privileges of caste, by opening up to discussion the inestimable treasures which were hidden away in the hands of a very few, who have even lost the use of them.<sup>19</sup>

The Vedanta includes all, even the atheist, in its scheme of values. The mission of service has no sectarianism about it.

We reject none, neither theist, nor pantheist, monist, polytheist, agnostic, nor atheist; the only condition of being a disciple is modelling a character at once the broadest and the most intense.<sup>20</sup>

Vivekananda fretted and fumed for men, for a band of youth with character, "whose life is one burning love—selfless", youth with "muscles of iron and nerves of steel inside which dwells a mind of the same material as that of which the thunderbolt is made",<sup>21</sup> "gigantic wills that nothing can resist", "meeting death face to face".

He got them. A generation of youth was consecrated and consumed in his flaming ideals, missionaries who dedicated their lives, revolutionaries who braved the perils of an un-

trodden path, visionaries who left the academies to serve the villages. As Romain Rolland said rightly: "If the generation that followed, saw, three years after Vivekananda's death, the revolt of Bengal, the prelude to the great movement of Tilak and Gandhi, if India to-day has definitely taken part in the collective action of organised masses, it is due to the initial shock, to the mighty 'Lazarus, come forth!' of the Message from Madras".<sup>22</sup>

### *The Testament*

Kropotkin wrote in his *Memoirs* that a morally developed personality is needed in every organisation and movement which have great tasks to perform. Mere intellectual power cannot create anything in a nation. The life and words of Vivekananda moulded the moral personality of the nationalist youth who received their baptism from him and fitted themselves for imponderable tasks.

Once during his novitiate Ramakrishna asked him what was his highest ambition in life. "To remain always in *samadhi*," was the answer. "I thought you had been born for something greater," came the rejoinder. The mystic saint saw that the boy was to grow into India's man of destiny. He bequeathed the fruits of his *tapas* to his spiritual child and made a gift of him to the country. Vivekananda lived to discharge this mission of the Master. He became a battleground of the forces that were contending for mastery in the motherland, *satva* and *rajas*, spirit and matter, old heritage and new incursion. He personified the travails of the age and burning flame which lighted the path.

Vivekananda was not only the soul of the puritan national resurgence, the prophet of the socialist order, the bridge between the Eastern spirit and the Western science; he also delivered a message which has since been the bedrock of Indian nationalism. It is that the nation is a spiritual entity charged with a mission,—*viz.*, to serve the united humanity. Because of this historic mission, India has been in the past a testing ground of racial and cultural synthesis. Because of



this, she must live in the future. Aurobindo, Rabindranath and Gandhi worked upon this idea in their different ways. As Romain Rolland said, Aurobindo was "the voice of Vivekananda risen from the pyre".<sup>23</sup> While Vivekananda liberalised the Vedanta and reconciled it with science and reason, Aurobindo carried the process further towards a philosophical integration. Rabindranath in his inimitable poetry and prose echoed the warnings that the edifice of political freedom cannot be built on the quicksands of social slavery. Gandhi took heed of the warning and started the campaign against untouchability. He also imbibed the ideal of Vivekananda that the spring of all social action must be a loving heart and developed it into the social philosophy of Sarvodaya.

### *The Spark that Blew*

Last but not the least of his legacies was the revolutionary fire which smouldered under ashes during his lifetime. His disciple Nivedita took the fire and blew it among the young nationalists who were seeking a new path. The secret police of Bengal wondered why they found the books of Vivekananda whenever they went to search a house. The last and best of this fiery band was Subhas Bose who in his adolescent age got his life's mission from the works of Vivekananda, viz., "to effect my own salvation and to serve humanity by abandoning all wordly desires and breaking away from all undue restraints",<sup>24</sup>. The Ramakrishna Mission's work of charity and philanthropy was a small part of his ideas. His testament was for a new human order. Bose realised this when his spiritual leanings drew him in his early age to the path of revolutionary nationalism,—"Vivekananda's teachings have been neglected by his own followers—by the Ramakrishna Mission which he had founded—and we are going to give effect to them".<sup>25</sup>

Vivekananda did not die in 1902. He lived till 1946. His ideas, his *sadhana* flowed in different channels to enrich and vitalise the nation and enabled it to win the first round.

With Gandhi and Bose closes the epoch which he had opened. A new chapter has begun. The future will show whether his soul has died or it will reincarnate to spiritualise the nation and to guide it to the conquest of mankind.

## NOTE

- (1) Vivekananda insisted that his trip must be financed not by the rich but by the common people whom he was going to represent at the 'parliament'. A part of the passage, however, was contributed by a prince, the Raja of Khetri, which he could not refuse.
- (2) *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Vol. V, fourth edition, p.80.
- (3) *Works*, Vol. III, fourth edition, p.221.
- (4) *Ibid*, p.159.
- (5) *Ibid*, p.300.
- (6) *The Letters of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, p.141.
- (7) *Works*, Vol. VIII, first edition, p.484.
- (8) *Works*, Vol. VII, third edition, p.308.
- (9) *Letters*, p.320.
- (10) *Works*, Vol. VII, third edition, p.309.
- (11) *Letters*, p.79.
- (12) Sister Nivedita : *The Master as I saw Him*, Udbodhan Office, Calcutta, fifth edition (1939), p.314.
- (13) *Works*, Vol. V, fourth edition, p.128.
- (14) *Letters*, p.142.
- (15) *Works*, Vol. I, sixth edition, p.113.
- (16) *Works*, Vol. IV, fourth edition, p.337.
- (17) *Works*, Vol. II, fifth edition, p.334.
- (18) *Ibid*, p.65.
- (19) *Works*, Vol. III, fourth edition, p.157.
- (20) *Letters*, p.83.
- (21) *Ibid*, p.309.
- (22) *The Life of Vivekananda*, English translation, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, 1944, p.125.
- (23) *Prophets of the New India*, translation by E. F. Malcolm-Smith, (Cassell) London, 1930, p.502.
- (24) Subhas Chandra Bose : *Autobiography*, Calcutta (1948), p.45.
- (25) *Ibid*, p.68. Cf. Aurobindo : "The work that was begun at Dakshineswar is far from finished, it is not even understood. That which Vivekananda received and strove to develop has not yet materialised." *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, fourth edition, Calcutta, p.36.

# 11

## RABINDRANATH TAGORE

(1861—1941)

*Hiran Kumar Sanyal*

Rabindranath Tagore was born on 7 May 1861 (25th of Baisakh) in the Jorasanko house built by Dwarkanath Tagore. He was the eighth of the Maharshi's sons, the first of whom, Dwijendranath, was at that time twenty-one years old.

Rabindranath's father, the Maharshi, an austere person, brought up his children very simply. But that did not matter much for young Rabindranath who had plenty to interest him in the spacious house with its long corridors and shadowy corners, its many occupants including the servants, and the large garden with a pond that surrounded the house. The house and the garden formed as it were a wonder-world for the sensitive child that Rabindranath was, and the sights and sounds of this world made lasting impressions on him, impressions later recorded in his two books, *Jibansmriti* (Reminiscences) and *Chhelebelā* (Boyhood Days). Even as a child he had a deep feeling for the beauty and the mystery of the world and he has described how he would wake up at dawn and watch with a thrill the first flush of light on the tips of the huge palm-fronds in the garden. As the child grew into a boy and the boy into a man, this feeling for beauty developed into an intense love

of nature, perhaps the most remarkable trait in Rabindranath's poetry.

Rabindranath received very little formal schooling. There were two short spells, first at the Oriental Seminary which was near his home and where the teaching was done by Indian masters. It was a most unpleasant experience for the child to whom school seemed like a prison and the particular master who taught his class looked to him "like a cane incarnate". Some years later he was sent to the St. Xavier's College, a missionary establishment, where he found much greater sympathy. One of the masters here prompted him to translate the first scene from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, a difficult task for a boy hardly twelve years old; but the creditable way in which it was done seems today in retrospect to have been brilliant with the promise of future greatness. He also did a certain amount of reading in the classical literature of Europe (in English translation of course) under the guidance of his masters here which must have done him an immense amount of good. But, on the whole, St. Xavier's also, though not quite as bad as the Oriental Seminary, did not suit him and he was soon taken off—a decision arrived at not by his father but by his elder brothers who had been entrusted with his bringing up.

One of these, Hemendranath, the third son of the Maharshi and about sixteen years older than Rabindranath, had already made him, along with three other children of the family, undergo a pretty severe period of schooling at home. The children were taught nearly everything, including even wrestling. But what is more remarkable was that the teaching was done entirely in Bengali. Western manners and English speech, both very fashionable among educated Indians, were taboo in the Tagore family, one of the most advanced in Bengal. (It was of course the Maharshi who imposed this taboo. As in so many other things, he was so strict in its observance that he once returned unread a letter written to him in English by one of his sons-in-law). This

is a significant fact in the training of Rabindranath as a Bengali man of letters.

It would thus appear that, contrary to the wide-spread notion, young Rabindranath's education, far from being neglected, was fairly well taken care of by his elders. His real education and, as a matter of fact, his training as a poet and a composer started, however, when in his early teens he was admitted as a full-fledged member of the galaxy of talents his elder brothers, themselves highly talented, had gathered round them.

The magnetic personalities of Dwarkanath 'the Prince', and Debendranath 'the Great Sage', had drawn to their residence the leading celebrities of their times. The flow continued unabated as the third generation of Tagores, the Maharshi's sons, Dwijendranath, Satyendranath, Hemendranath, Jyotirindranath, grew up. All the brothers were very capable composers of songs, particularly the last-named. Dwijendranath, the eldest, the *Baradada* (Mahatma Gandhi also always spoke of him with reverent affection as *Baradada*) was a philosopher and a poet, whose long poem, a fantasy named *Dream Journey*, is indeed a strikingly original work. Satyendranath and Jyotirindranath too have left writings of considerable merit.

In this remarkable company, consisting of all these brothers and their friends, were also some of the most eminent musicians of the day. As young Rabindranath listened to their songs, his mind was soaked in the spirit of the classical music of India at its best, a fact which is evident in the entire range of his musical compositions.

Rabindranath had already started writing poems and composing songs; even his juvenilia showed considerable promise. He seems to have attained maturity in his songs earlier than in his poetry. A possible reason for this is the fact that while the channels of poetry had dried up after the Vaishnava poets of the 13th—17th centuries, there had been

little interruption in the continuity of the tradition of music, both classical and folk, in Bengal as in the rest of India, and this tradition was as vital as ever when Rabindranath started to give it a new lease of life and a new orientation.

While still in his teens, Rabindranath composed a series of poems in the Vaishnava manner and published them not under his own name, but as the *Padavali of Bhanu Singha*, an obscure Vaishnava poet claimed to have been discovered by him. Strangely enough, these poems were accepted as such even by discerning critics of the time: a repetition of Chatterton's performance without the exposure and the humiliation. They are no better than competent *pastiche*, considered as poetry, but Rabindranath's originality of style as a musical composer is clearly evident in their tunes. These songs are among the listeners' favourite even today.

One of the early land-marks of the young poet's life was his (first) visit to England. He sailed from Bombay in September 1878 with his second brother Satyendranath, who had become the first Indian member of the Indian Civil Service. During this stay for a year and a half in England, Rabindranath attended lectures on English literature at the London University and also wrote a very sentimental verse-drama called *The Broken Heart* which he later rejected as an immature effort. Besides listening to lectures, he made many contacts with individual Englishmen and English women, opportunities for which were provided by his residence with an English family. These personal contacts and the study of English literature were among the abiding influences in his life. English literature, English poetry in particular, acted like an 'open sesame' to his receptive mind and there can be no doubt that but for this early impact his own poetry would have been very different indeed.

On his return from Europe, Rabindranath settled down to the life of a writer and a composer. Bankimchandra's *Bangadarsan* had started to come out in 1872 and every issue was eagerly looked forward to by young and old

readers who formed the intellectual core of Bengal's middle class. A new spirit was astir; the impact of the West on the East had released a whole new set of ideas. Since Ram-mohan Roy, a succession of writers had attempted to express these ideas in Bengali prose, but it was not till the *Bangadarsan* arrived that there was anything like a real literary platform in Bengal (the *Tattvabodhini Patrika* in spite of the influence exercised by it in shaping contemporary Bengali thought was not a literary journal in the strict sense). It was left to Bankim to create what had hardly ever before existed in Bengal—a real literary discipline. This fact explains why of all the influences of his predecessors that of Bankim was the most considerable in Rabindranath's training for a literary career.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the first real poet of the renaissance, was fourteen years older than Bankim. But, though a revolutionary figure in the literary history of Bengal, he made little conscious impression on young Rabindranath who wrote a very trenchant review of Michael's magnum opus, *Meghnad-badh* (The Slaying of Meghnad). Years later Rabindranath recanted and wrote a very handsome balanced appreciation of Michael). There can also be no doubt that Rabindranath benefited from the invaluable spade-work done by Michael in liberating Bengali verse from metrical patterns which were too rigid to be suitable framework for the new poetry of the renaissance. But, even after all this is acknowledged, the fact remains that the review referred to was not just the expression of adolescent insolence. Michael wrote many lyrics of considerable beauty, but for his major work he chose a form which, in spite of the fact that it breathed the defiant spirit of the rising Bengali radicals, could hold little appeal for an adolescent poet the very cast of whose mind was lyrical.

But it is not form alone that divides the two greatest poets in the thousand-year old history of Bengali poetry. There is the question of approach, too. Michael has been

called a revolutionary poet, a description which he no doubt merits. But who will deny that Rabindranath effected a greater revolution in Bengali literature—in prose, in poetry, and in the very texture of our literary sensibility? But while Michael's method was that of the blitz, Rabindranath accomplished his revolution by a war of attrition as it were, that is to say, a slow build-up over the years. Yet, it is interesting to compare how the two poets looked at the character of Ramachandra. Michael's contemptuous description of the hero of Ramayana ('Rama and his rabble') is well-known. In a notable prose passage, Rabindranath writes acidly of Rama's treatment of Sita and makes sardonic comments on the mentality of a people who worship a person with such imbecile ethics.

Rabindranath, it must be remembered, was a great traditionalist. But in order to be a traditionalist, you do not have to accept all the values that a particular society has believed in over the centuries. In Indian tradition there are many currents; Rabindranath accepted some of them and rejected others which had not only been accepted but propagated as articles of faith by Bankimchandra. The clash between the two over some of these issues is a thrilling episode in the literary history of Bengal. But in spite of the ideological difference between the two, Bankim was too acute a literary critic to miss the significance of even the early work of Rabindranath. Shortly after the latter published his *Sandhya Sangit* (Evening Songs) at the age of about twenty, Bankimchandra put the garland given to him by his host at a wedding reception round the neck of Rabindranath, saying, "It is he who deserves the garland. Have you not read his *Evening Songs*?"

Rabindranath has himself said that in *Evening Songs* he achieved for the first time a distinctive note of his own. This note appears to alternate between the "negative capabilities" of Keats and a sort of soft-pedalled sentimentality; but it leaves the reader in no doubt that here for the first time



is not only a new note in Bengali poetry, but, most certainly, a new idiom indicating a qualitative change, a new orientation in the sensibility of the Bengali mind. *Evening Songs* (1881) really heralded the birth of modern romantic poetry in Bengali. Both in form and in content, this new poetry was still immature, but this immaturity was not to last long.

The clouds of uncertainty and doubt that had enveloped the poet when writing *Evening Songs* were soon dissipated by a feeling of complete communion with the joyous spirit of nature which finds expression in the poems of the next volume, *Morning Songs*. After this there is no looking back. But maturity was not yet. Three more volumes of poetry followed, marking successive stages in the ripening genius of Rabindranath. Then, in his early thirties in 1893-94 came *Sonar Tari* (The Golden Boat), a land-mark in the history of poetry not only in Bengal but perhaps in the whole world. For here was a major poetical work, judged by any standard, in which the powerful backwash of the romantic poetry of the West found not only a new channel of expression but also a new note giving to the romantic tradition a fresh sanction for existence.

What this new note is it is not very easy to explain, but there is no doubt that it is evident from the first poem which gives the title to the volume. It seems to spring from the polarity in the poet's mind of two conflicting experiences: the individual, imagined or rather felt as the absolute value, set against the eternal flux of nature, the relentless passage of time against which the individual is helpless. This passage of time was not only symbolised by but very concretely reflected in the swiftly flowing current of the river Padma (the name by which the Ganga is known in her wide lower reaches as she passes through the state of West Bengal and what is now East Pakistan) on the bank of which he had now made his home. For here, in an old indigo-planter's house at a place called Silaida was the head-quarters of the family estates of the Tagores, scattered over the riverine

areas of North and Central Bengal, the administration of which was now entrusted to the care of Rabindranath by his father. Though not one of the largest landed estates in Bengal, the property was large enough to need quite a lot of travelling. Rabindranath did nearly all the travelling by boat, catching intimate glimpses of the life of the people during his journey. His daily routine was to attend to business in the morning, listening to the grievances of his tenants, mostly cultivators, settling matters of dispute, and then to retire into the retreat of his boat and spend the rest of the day, and often enough far into the night, reading and writing.

It was a unique experience for him: the river-side life, the starry silent nights, the stunning beauty of moonlight on the stretching sand-banks of the river Padma. All these passed into his poetry inspiring imageries that seem as if they have been carved out of the very earth and sky enveloping his beloved river. And not his poetry alone. Many of his short stories, which he had started writing a little earlier, are the direct result of the impact that the Bengal countryside and its unsophisticated inhabitants made on his sophisticated and sensitive mind. About this time he was also editing a literary journal, *Sadhana*, a worthy successor to Bankim's *Bangadarsan*. In doing so, he was editing the Bengali language and Bengali thought as well.

When Bankimchandra died in 1894, Rabindranath had already finished writing the poems of *Sonar Tari*. He had spread himself out in other directions as well, and his exuberant pen had produced prose and poetry in all their varied forms with almost equal abundance in either case. As Rabindranath used to say, Bankimchandra reigned like an emperor in the literary world in Bengal. But his death left no gap. At the age of thirty-three Rabindranath had already produced a body of work, in prose and verse, which entitled him to be ranked as the greatest literary figure of the Bengal Renaissance. His best novels and perhaps the best

plays were yet to come; but he had written some of the finest poems and some of his greatest short stories and composed many of the most moving songs. He had written essays on literary and political subjects which were not only landmarks in the development of Bengali prose style but were aglow with creative thinking, though a great deal more was still to come. The Golden Boat had been launched and it was destined to make history for nearly fifty years.

It would be out of place within the restricted scope of this article to deal with the details of Rabindranath's literary career and life history, the barest outline of which can be attempted here. But two points may be noted. One is that Rabindranath did not attain his maturity and reveal his full potentiality as a writer till he reached the age of about thirty-five, an age never reached by Shelley or Keats. Wordsworth and Coleridge, though they lived to be old men, had done their best work before they had reached this age. Only the romantics are mentioned, because it is with them that Rabindranath's affinity is most pronounced. The other point to note is that in the case of Rabindranath this was only the beginning. The Golden Boat steered not only an almost even course through the five remaining decades of the poet's life, it also retained its lustre almost till the day of the final crossing.

With the turn of the century Rabindranath entered on a new phase of his life. The house that his father had built in the countryside mainly as a retreat, where seekers after God could meditate in quiet surroundings, had been used by the poet now and then for spending short vacations away from his work of looking after the family estate. He now made this Santiniketan his permanent home and founded here a school (1901) as a protest against the current system of education which he considered to be 'machine-made', altogether alien to Indian tradition, and destructive of the spirit of man. Soon after the establishment of the school he lost his wife (1902), whom he had married in 1883, followed

by the death of a daughter after only a few months. Four years later his younger son, whom he dearly loved, passed away suddenly. He bore these losses with a fortitude that shows the superb strength of his character. At the time of his son's death he was writing his famous novel, *Gora*, instalments of which were appearing in the Bengali monthly *Prabasi*. On hearing of his son's death, the editor, Ramananda Chattopadhyay, wrote to the poet expressing his sympathy and asking him not to bother about sending the instalment for the next issue. Rabindranath however did send the instalment in due time for publication.

In a memorable sonnet the poet had described the sunset of the 19th century in a setting of blood-red clouds; the reference is to the Boer War which had deeply touched the poet's heart. The poems written about this time are all informed by a sensitive humanism. There followed many patriotic and religious lyrics in which the spirit and message of ancient India was glorified.

*Naivedya* (Offerings) in which these poems were published was followed by *Kheya* (Crossing) in which the religious note is more pronounced. This was a new departure; for, though Rabindranath had composed a great many religious songs, mostly hymns intended to be sung during service at Brahmo prayer meetings, the content of his poetry had hardly ever before been religious in the accepted sense of the word. This phase did not last long, for very soon he went back to the old habit of expressing religious feelings through the medium of song alone. But, while the phase lasted, religion loomed as the pre-occupation of his mind. This was evident also in the famous *Santiniketan* series of sermons which belong to this period. The end of the first decade of the century saw the culmination of this phase in the collection of songs published under the name of *Gitanjali*.

There had been, however, a notable interlude. In 1905 was carried through Lord Curzon's decision to partition

Bengal, setting the whole country astir as it had never been before, not even during the agitation caused by the illfated Ilbert bill. Rabindranath, a romantic poet if ever there was one, had never been an escapist. He had participated little in active politics; but, as a writer, contemporary political events had always interested him. He had strongly criticised, at times with bitter sarcasm, the policy of the Congress which he dubbed as sheer shameless begging. He had even described a political meeting held at the Calcutta Town Hall as a *tamasa* (farce).

But now it was different. The whole of Bengal, with the whole of India behind it, was united in opposition to Curzon's crippling scheme of partition. The anti-partition movement brought to the fore great leaders: Aswinikumar Datta, Aurobinda Ghosh, Anandamohan Bose, Bipinchandra Pal, Surendranath Banerji—names to conjure with in those days. The magic wand of Rabindranath's pen did a lot of conjuring with the last-mentioned name: what the country needed in that hour of crisis was, he proclaimed in a famous speech, a leadership of appropriate calibre that was to be found only in the person of Surendranath Banerji. Rabindranath was only voicing what thousands of his countrymen felt to be true. Surendranath, the magnificent orator, seemed indeed to be the heaven-sent leader of the country for the moment.

In sharp contrast to this thesis on leadership, if it may be described as such, Rabindranath in a poem paid a tribute to Aurobinda Ghosh, whom he saluted as the one leader who had refused to demean himself by begging for paltry concessions at the doors of the alien rulers. There can be no doubt that in their approach to political problems there was much greater affinity between Rabindranath and Aurobinda than between Rabindranath and Surendranath Banerji, and in the total context of Rabindranath's writings the speech referred to above seems more or less to be an aberration. Yet it is important as an indication of the extent to which he

had identified himself with popular feelings, the feelings, that is, of the educated intelligentsia in those hectic days.

But it was Rabindranath Tagore himself who stands out in retrospect as the most picturesque personality of the period. He ceremoniously tied the *rakhi* (a band of coloured thread), as symbol and pledge of comradeship in the national struggle against partition, round the wrists of his compatriots and led processions singing his patriotic songs, some of the most inspiring ever composed by him. The whole of Bengal resounded with these songs, the themes of which were the futility and shame of begging for political privileges ("For very shame do not wet the soil with your tears") and the glory of golden Bengal with its network of rivers, stretching fields of paddy and tree-shaded villages ("My golden Bengal, I love you") that had already come to life in his short stories and poems. Speaking at a mass meeting on the day of the *Vijaya* following the partition, Rabindranath said: "For the first time the Bengalis realize today that they are one people". That was how he felt and that was what he made others feel.

If Bankimchandra was the prophet of nationalism, and Vivekananda its most vigorous propagandist, Rabindranath now emerged as its high-priest; but it was a different kind of nationalism that he preached, not the militant Hindu nationalism of Bankim, but a nationalism the twin components of which were an intense love of the soil and a defiant spirit of self-reliance. Rabindranath was not content to preach and to sing. He also made himself busy with constructive work, drawing up schemes for national education and for self-sufficient community-life organized on a village-basis.

These activities, creative and constructive, constitute a glorious chapter in the poet's life-story, but it is all too short a chapter. There was soon a split in the Indian National Congress, and Rabindranath found himself caught between the moderates led among others by Surendranath, and the

extremists headed by the famous Lal-Bal-Pal combination. The simmering discontent against British rule broke out in acts of revolutionary violence. Rabindranath abruptly left the scene of political activities and withdrew to Santiniketan. He was bitterly blamed by many of his associates for deserting them. It is difficult to explain why he did so. His own explanation is that, being essentially a poet, political activities were alien to his calling. Why then did he throw himself into the hurly-burly of political struggle with such gusto at the beginning of the partition agitation? The answer perhaps is that in the first stage of the movement there had been a unity of feeling among all sections of the people which deeply touched a poet's creative mind. Later, when politicians came to dominate the scene, the movement lost its creative urge and ceased to inspire poetry. Yet the fact must be recognised that Rabindranath never really understood or felt any sympathy for political struggle on a mass scale, as his attitude to the non-cooperation movement clearly revealed some fifteen years later.

This withdrawal from the political scene may or may not be interpreted as a poetic retreat from reality; but the fact remains that he was not done with politics yet and that as a writer he never ceased to wrestle with the problems of his fellowmen either on the moral or on the political plane. An instance is furnished by his novel, *Gora*. The relationship of individuals, men and women, touched by the new awareness, which Rabindranath himself had done so much to awaken within the framework of the national consciousness—this, in short, is the theme of the novel, perhaps the most significant in Bengali literature up to date, in spite of some shortcomings as an artistic creation. No other novel in Bengali reflects to a greater extent than *Gora* does contemporary social trends, that is to say, not only those trends which were visible on the surface but those which revealed themselves only to the sensitive and discerning mind of the author.

When Bankimchandra died in 1894, Rabindranath at thirty-three was already the major force in Bengali literature; his significance however was not fully realized by all his contemporaries, many of whom abused and belittled him. At the end of the first decade of the present century, he had acquired a stature which placed him, in the eyes of discerning contemporaries, among the very greatest Bengalis ever born. A Rabindra-cult had in the meantime grown up around him and, on the completion of his fiftieth year in 1911, a reception was accorded to him at a crowded meeting in the Calcutta Town Hall. Yet public recognition on a country-wide scale did not come to him till, in the words of Bipinchandra Pal, the Nobel Prize (1913) put on him the "hall-mark of European approbation".

Minor honours followed the award of the Nobel Prize: a doctorate in literature awarded at last by the Calcutta University and a Knighthood conferred by the alien government. But what was more important was that the Nobel Prize led to world-wide contacts; nearly every country in the world opened its doors to him and Rabindranath undertook lecture tours the outcome of which were such books as *Nationalism*, *Sadhana*, *Personality*, and *The Religion of Man* (Hibbert Lectures).

Several volumes of translations of his poems also followed the English version of *Gitanjali* which had earned the Nobel Prize. To a Bengali reader, who is also fond of English poetry, these translations communicate very little of the flavour of the originals. This, of course, is quite natural, for the 'meaning' of poetry, as apart from its 'sense', lies in the rich verbal overtones and subtleties of association which are so integrated with the language of the poem that they are mostly incommunicable in translation. This holds true of even the English *Gitanjali*, which brought Rabindranath world-fame and which is perhaps the best translated book of his to appear in English.



The reason is that the 'poems' in the English version of *Gitanjali* are mostly translations of the words of Bengali songs in which melody and meaning are not only inseparably intertwined with each other but actually came together in the process of composition (this is generally true of all his songs). The point of it all is that Rabindranath the poet, as he appears in his English renderings, is altogether different from Rabindranath the Bengali poet. The translations of his plays retain more of the essence of the originals.

But the prose-works of Rabindranath in English are different in that, in the first place, they are not translations from Bengali and, secondly, they contain in a more crystallized form than we find anywhere in his Bengali writings what may, for want of a more adequate expression, be described as his philosophy. The essence of the two main aspects of this philosophy is summed up in the following two quotations, the first of which is taken from an appendix to his *Religion of Man* and the second from the essay on 'Nationality' in *Creative Unity*, a collection of essays in English.

My religion (the poet said in the course of a conversation with Albert Einstein) is in the reconciliation of the Super-personal Man, the Universal Human Spirit, in my own individual being.

In the essay on 'Nationality' referred to above, he says:

The peoples are living beings. They have their distinct personalities. But nations are organisations of power, and therefore their inner aspects and outward expressions are everywhere monotonously the same. Their differences are merely differences in degree of efficiency.

Again,

Therefore I do not put my faith in any new institution, but in the individuals all over the world who think clearly, feel nobly, and act rightly, thus becoming the channels of moral truth. Our moral

ideals do not work with chisels and hammers. Like trees, they spread their roots in the soil and their branches in the sky, without consulting any architect for their plans.

Much more downright than the above is his condemnation of nationalism in the collection of lectures published under the name *Nationalism*. These lectures were delivered in Japan (where for the time being he became quite unpopular) and the United States about ten years after he played the role of the high-priest of nationalism in Bengal during the anti-partition movement. Yet, basically, there is no inconsistency. For, in both instances, it is the humanism of Rabindranath which is the substratum, the bed-rock, of all his political views and writings; the difference is only in the rhetoric. A careful study of his *Nationalism* also makes it clear that the real target of his indictment is imperialism rather than nationalism.

It is Rabindranath's humanism which shaped his views, philosophical or political. He never attempted to present or perhaps even think out a body of metaphysical doctrines, nor was he ever interested in politics as such. But humanist he always was, one of the very greatest in history, and it was as such that he wrote an indignant letter to the Viceroy of India in 1919, renouncing his Knighthood as a gesture of noble protest against the brutal massacre of unarmed men and women in the Punjab.

It was again as a humanist that he raised his lone voice against the doctrine of the *charkha* and the boycott of Western education preached by Mahatma Gandhi during the non-cooperation movement; in doing so, unfortunately, he failed to appreciate the essential character of the movement as a mass struggle for the country's independence. More fruitful but also essentially humanistic was the impulse which created in 1921 the institution of higher education, the Viswabharati, as the bridge between India and the World, and the rural reconstruction centre, Sriniketan.

If he had still illusions about the British rulers of India, he seemed to have shed them completely when, about ten years later in a poem seething with anger and agony, he asked whether God had forgiven those whose ruthless action poisoned His air and darkened His light. The immediate occasion for this poem was the shooting down of unarmed prisoners in a political detention camp. Rabindranth's disillusionment with British rule, strengthened perhaps by a visit to Russia in 1930, is seen at its deepest in his last testament to the country, *Crisis in Civilization*, written in April 1941 when the shadow of death was already upon him. He was then at the height of his powers as a writer: *Crisis in Civilization* is written in a Bengali prose unmatched for its nervous strength.

In the post Nobel Prize period were also written some of his best poems. *Balaka*, published in 1916, was a dazzling achievement. Ten years later, a new book of verse, *Purabi*, came out and added to his stature as a poet. Even the last poems, dictated a few days before his death in August 1941 when his fingers had grown too feeble to hold a pen, are the revelation of a facet of his mind which had never come out in his poetry before.

These poems seem to close with a question-mark a unique poetic career: Did he still have fresh worlds to conquer? Were there stored in the deeper layers of his mind unresolved tensions which had never come out in his poetry before and which only approaching death released from all inhibitions? Perhaps his amazing paintings, begun when he was in his sixties, prompt a similar question.

## 12

### POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS BEFORE 1857

*Anil Chandra Banerjee*

The dawn of political consciousness (in the modern sense of the term) in Bengal was closely connected with the consolidation of British rule and the resultant infiltration of Western ideas, and it was during the early years of the nineteenth century that the many-sided genius of Raja Ram-mohan Roy gave it a direction and a purpose. His political ideas developed on the lines laid down by Montesquieu, Blackstone, and Bentham, with whose writings he appears to have been quite familiar. From the French philosopher "he derived the ideas of the Separation of Powers and of the Rule of Law, both of which points he emphasises again and again in all his writings".<sup>1</sup> Bentham's views attracted him towards the problem of legislation. Blackstone's *Commentaries* taught him the importance of civil liberty, a political concept unknown in India in pre-British days. These lessons his resourceful mind applied to the actual problems of his times. He was a practical reformer, not a speculative idealist, although he could occasionally enunciate fundamental principles such as the following:

If mankind are brought into existence, and by nature formed to enjoy the comforts of society and the pleasure of an improved mind they may be justified in opposing any system, religious, domestic or political, which is inimical to the happiness of society, or calculated to debase the human intellect.<sup>2</sup>

The problem of law-making in India came up for discussion in 1832-33 in connection with the renewal of the East India Company's Charter. The Raja opposed strenuously the proposal in favour of establishing a Legislative Council in this country. He was afraid that the Legislature would be dominated by the Company's servants; he did not want the Executive to add law-making to its functions. As he pointed out clearly in his petition to the King-in-Council, "all their (*i.e.*, Indian's) civil and religious rights (would be) placed entirely at the mercy of such individuals as may be sent from England to assume the executive authority in this country or rise into power through the routine of office, and who from long officiating in an inferior station may have contracted prejudices against individuals of classes or men, which ought not to find shelter in the breasts of the Legislator".<sup>3</sup> When we remember the composition of the Legislative Council created by the Charter Act of 1853 we must admit that the Raja's anticipation was singularly correct; the principle of representation in its most rudimentary form was not recognised till 1892 and in the Raja's days no Indian could have expected a seat in the Company's Legislature.

Although the Raja was in favour of law-making by "the supreme legislative power" (*i.e.* the British Parliament), he wanted Indian public opinion to be reflected in legislation. For this purpose he strongly advocated the freedom of the Press. A free press, he felt, would serve as a link between the law-makers and the Indian people; it would also enable the Company's Directors to judge for themselves "whether the systems introduced in their possessions, prove so beneficial to the natives of the country as their authors might fondly suppose or would have others believe and whether the Rules and Regulations which may appear excellent in their eyes, are strictly put in practice".<sup>4</sup> The Raja also proposed "the appointment of a commission composed of gentlemen of intelligence and respectability, totally unconnected with the Governing Body in this country, which may from time to time, investigate on the spot, the condition of Your Majesty's

faithful subjects, and judge with their own eyes regarding the operation of the systems of law and jurisprudence under which they live".<sup>5</sup> Thirdly, public opinion on any legislative proposal should be ascertained, he suggested, by sending a copy to "the principal Zamindars such as the Rajas of Burdwan, Bihar, Benares etc., and to the highly respectable merchants such as Jagat Set at Murshidabad, Babu Baijnath at Patna and the representatives of Babu Manohar Das at Benares .... for their opinion on each clause of the Regulation....".<sup>6</sup> In the Raja's opinion, "these being the persons who are affected by the Regulations, they will be cautious of recommending any that is injurious".<sup>7</sup>

Obviously Rammohan did not contemplate the possibility of the common people claiming a share in law-making through this indirect process. "The idea that laws affect as much the humblest of the citizens as the highest and that every adult and sane member of the community should have a voice in the making of laws, did not then find acceptance in any state in the world".<sup>8</sup> The Benthamite doctrine of universal suffrage, which was rejected even in industrialized Britain, did not appeal to the Raja's practical mind. He was prepared to recognise aristocratic privilege not only in law-making but also in judicial matters. Persons of high rank, he thought, should be tried by a special commission composed of three or more persons of the same rank.<sup>9</sup> Was he thinking of the English doctrine of trial by peers?

It would be wrong, however, to conclude that the Raja was either unaware of, or indifferent to, the sufferings of the common people. Under Regulation 1 of 1793, he argued, "it is its (*i.e.* Government's) right and its duty to protect the cultivators as being from their situation most helpless". He preferred the Zamindari settlement to the Ryotwari settlement although he felt "the greatest pain" to "allude" to "the melancholy condition of the agricultural labourers". The remedy he suggested was the abolition of the Zamindar's prescriptive right to increase rent. "I am satisfied", he wrote

"that an unjust precedent and practice....cannot be considered as the standard of justice by an enlightened Government".<sup>10</sup>

This confidence in the benevolence of "an enlightened Government" inspired the Raja's political thought and programme. In his *Memorial to the Supreme Court* he said that the Indians "are fortunately placed by Providence under the protection of the whole British Nation, or that the King of England and his Lords and Commons are their Legislators, and that they are secured in the enjoyment of the same civil and religious privileges that every Briton is entitled to in England".<sup>11</sup> In his *Final Appeal to the Christian Public* he thanked "the Supreme Disposer of the Universe, for having unexpectedly delivered this country, from the long continued tyranny of its former Rulers, and placed it under the Government of the English, a nation who not only are blessed with the enjoyment of civil and political liberty, but also interest themselves in promoting liberty and social happiness as well as free inquiry into literary and religious subjects, among those nations to which that influence extends".<sup>12</sup> He supported the idea of European colonisation in India because he was "impressed with the conviction that the greater our intercourse with European gentlemen, the greater will be our improvement in literary, social and political affairs".<sup>13</sup> He wanted the union between India and Britain to be permanent under a liberal system of administration calculated to make the people of this country firmly "attached to the present system of Government, so that it may become consolidated, and maintain itself by the influence of the intelligent and respectable classes of the inhabitants, and by the general good-will of the people, and not any longer stand isolated in the midst of its subjects, supporting itself merely by the exertion of superior force".<sup>14</sup> And if in the course of historical evolution India was separated from Britain,—a contingency which the Raja did not exclude from consideration,—it was his hope that the separation would be peaceful and that India, aided by the nations of Europe, would take

up the great work of "enlightening and civilising the surrounding nations of Asia".<sup>15</sup>

It is not a little surprising that, in an age in which India's contact with foreign countries was for all practical purposes confined to her political association with Britain, the Raja's political vision should have embraced "the surrounding nations of Asia" as also those European countries where the struggle between liberalism and autocracy was passing through strange vicissitudes. When he heard the news of the fall of constitutional government in Naples (1821) he wrote: "I am obliged to conclude that I shall not see liberty universally restored to the nations of Europe, and Asiatic nations....I consider the cause of the Neapolitans as my own, and their enemies, as ours. Enemies to liberty and friends of despotism have never been and never will be ultimately successful."<sup>16</sup> He gave a public dinner at the Town Hall to celebrate the triumph of the constitutional government in Spain. He welcomed the success of the French Revolution of 1830 and the passing of the First Reform Bill (1832) in Britain; he had "publicly avowed that in the event of the Reform Bill being defeated" he would "renounce my connection with this country".<sup>17</sup>

The Raja's active career in India came to an end in 1830 when he sailed for Britain; political activities in this country acquired a new vigour, if not a new direction, in 1843 when Dwarakanath Tagore came back from Britain in company with George Thompson. During the intervening twelve years some of the leading students of the Hindu College, who derived political inspiration from personal contact with the Raja, "made great efforts to rouse the political consciousness of the people of Bengal".<sup>18</sup> Among them Tarachand Chakravorty, Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee, Rasik Krishna Mullick, Ramgopal Ghosh and Pearychand Mitra deserve special mention. Their thought and character owed much to the teaching of Derozio. As Pearychand Mitra says, "He used to impress upon them the sacred duty of thinking for



themselves—to be in no way influenced by any of the idols mentioned by Bacon—to live and die for truth—to cultivate all the virtues, shunning vice in every shape. He often read examples from ancient history of the love of justice, patriotism, philanthropy and self-abnegation; and the way in which he set forth the points stirred up the minds of his pupils”.<sup>19</sup> Their imagination drew sustenance from the theories of Bacon, Hume and Paine as also from an idealised interpretation of the French Revolution. In 1830 the tri-colour was hoisted on the Ochterlony Monument, presumably by enthusiasts of the Hindu College group, and writing in the *Bengal Harakuru* in 1843 an ‘Old Hindoo’ made pro-Revolution comments which provoked angry criticism from the *Friend of India*: “To assert that if the Natives had enjoyed the blessings of the French Revolution, they would by this time have been treated like men, and assumed a proper position among the nations of the earth, is to write absolute nonsense. Let him read Thiers and Allison before he again ventures to long for a revolution which would have turned the Hooghly into a revolutionary torrent, and established a permanent guillotine in Tank Square”.<sup>20</sup>

It was through several associations and periodicals that the Hindu College group tried to propagate their ideas and programme. The Academic Association, established in 1828 under the guidance of Derozio, arranged discussions on subjects such as “free will, free ordination, fate, faith, the sacredness of truth, the high duty of cultivating virtue, and the meanness of vice, the nobility of patriotism, the attributes of God, and the arguments for and against the existence of the Deity as these have been set forth by Hume on the one side, and Reid, Dugald Stewart and Brown on the other, the hollowness of idolatry and the shams of the priesthood”. In 1838 was established the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge which had 200 members in 1843. On 8 February 1843, Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee read in a meeting of the Society his well known essay on ‘Present condition of the East India Company’s Courts of Judicature and

Police under the Bengal Presidency'. "The Delivery of this essay", observed the *Bengal Harakuru* on 2 March 1843, "was interrupted, as our readers will recollect, by the principal of the Hindoo College,<sup>21</sup> on the ground of its seditious and treasonable tendency. It has since been the subject of severe animadversion in the columns of several of our contemporaries....The attempts made to throw ridicule upon the intelligent natives of their country, for their laudable efforts to acquire a knowledge of the Government under which they live, and to aid in the removal of its abuses, appear to us most ungenerous and illiberal".<sup>22</sup> A third association, established under the inspiration of Dr. Duff, was known as The Hindu Theophilanthropic Society.

Among the periodicals published during this period mention may be made of *The Parthenon* (1830), the *Gyananneshun* (1831), the *Hindu Pioneer*, the *Bengal Spectator* (1842) and the *Inquirer*. While the *Inquirer* dealt mainly with social and religious matters, the *Gyananneshun* sought to instruct "the Hindoos in the science of government and jurisprudence" and the *Hindu Pioneer* and the *Bengal Spectator* wrote generally on political topics. Under the caption 'India under Foreigners' the *Hindu Pioneer* wrote: "The Government of India (under the English) is purely aristocratical; the people have no voice in the council of legislature; they have no hand in framing the laws which regulate their civil conduct. We need not expatiate on the monopoly of the State Service, the law's delay, the insolence of office, the heavy expenses of Government, the retirement from India of all those who acquire wealth, and the enormous taxation to which the country is subjected—evils too well known in India....The violent means by which foreign supremacy has been established, and the entire alienation of the people of the soil from any share in the Government, nay, even from all offices of trust and power, are circumstances which no commercial, no political benefits can authorise or justify".<sup>23</sup>

The references to "the monopoly of the State Service" and the drain of wealth are particularly interesting in view of the Raja's opinions on these issues. According to the *Bengal Spectator*, "It is to him that we are in great measure indebted for the concession in regard to the privileges of natives contained in the late Charter (1833)". Section 87 of the Charter Act of 1833 provided that "no Native of the said Territories, nor any natural born subject of His Majesty resident therein, shall, by reason only of his Religion, Place of Birth, Descent, Colour, or any of them, be disabled from holding any Place, Office, or Employment under the said Company". Speaking on the Bill in the House of Commons on 10 July 1833, Macaulay referred in glowing terms to "that wise, that benevolent, that noble clause". But the explanatory despatch of the Court of Directors (10 December 1834) emphasized the principle that "fitness is henceforth to be the criterion of eligibility" and observed: "...practically, perhaps, no very marked difference of results will be occasioned. The distinction between situations allotted to the covenanted service and all other situations of an official or public nature will remain generally as at present".<sup>24</sup> For a full decade after the passing of the Act nothing was done to open new avenues of employment for educated Indians who might satisfy the 'criterion of eligibility'. But several leaders of the Hindu College group, including Rasik Krishna Mullick, were appointed Deputy Collectors, and an Act creating the post of Deputy Magistrates was passed in 1843.

So far as drain of wealth from India was concerned the Raja supported the conclusions arrived at by several British observers, including the Serampore missionaries, and suggested as a remedy the establishment of European colonies in this country.<sup>25</sup> This remedy however did not appeal to the Hindu College group as a whole, nor did all of them endorse his preference for Zamindari settlement. Rasik Krishna Mullick for example, wrote: "The permanent settlement in Bengal, though perhaps concocted and set

to work with the best motive imaginable, has, in consequence of glaring defects in the judicial system, betrayed an utter neglect of the rights of the humbler classes".<sup>26</sup>

Apart from the Hindu College group there were other followers of the Raja who tried to create an active political consciousness in Bengal in the forties and fifties of the 19th century. Akshoy Kumar Datta, who edited the *Tattvabodhini Patrika* from 1843 to 1855, was a voluminous and stimulating writer on religious, social, educational and political problems.<sup>27</sup> Prasannacoomar Tagore, who conducted an influential journal called the *Reformer*, and Dwarakanath Tagore, who had a large proprietary interest in journals like the *India Gazette* and the *Bengal Harakaru*, utilised the press effectively for the propagation of their views. Having regard to their socio-economic affiliations it was quite natural for them to be more conservative than the Hindu College group. Prasannacoomar Tagore took a leading part in establishing (1837) the Zamindary Association, later known as the Landholders' Society, which has been described as "the first organisation of Bengal with a distinct political object". According to Raja Rajendra Lal Mitra, "It gave to the people the first lesson in the art of fighting constitutionally for their rights, and taught them manfully to assert their claims and give expression to their opinions. Ostensibly, it advocated the rights of the Zamindars, but as their rights are intimately bound up with those of the ryots, the one cannot be separated from the other." William Adam, a friend of the Raja, took up India's cause in England and established the British India Society (1839) which published a journal called the *British India Advocate* and with which the Landholders' Society co-operated.<sup>28</sup>

George Thompson's<sup>29</sup> arrival in India (January 1843) with Dwarakanath Tagore marked a new stage in the growth of political consciousness in this country. His speeches gave a new impetus to the agitation which had been theoretical so far, and at his suggestion the Bengal British India Society

was formed in April 1843. The object of the Society was "to secure the welfare extend the just rights, and advance the interests of all classes of our fellow subjects"; but it would "adopt and recommend such measures only, as are consistent with pure loyalty to the person and Government of the reigning sovereign of the British dominions and the due observance of the Laws and Regulations of the country; and shall discountenance every effort to subvert legal authority, or disturb the peace and wellbeing of Society". George Thompson became the Society's Agent in England.<sup>30</sup>

In 1849 Drinkwater Bethune, the then Law Member of the Governor-General's Council, prepared drafts of certain legislative measures intended to bring British-born subjects of the Crown under the jurisdiction of the courts and laws of the East India Company. The Europeans in Bengal, unwilling to tolerate any curtailment of their privileges, organised a powerful agitation against the so-called 'Black Acts' and compelled Bethune to withdraw his proposals. The leaders of the educated public in Bengal now appreciated the urgency of establishing a more effective political organisation than the Landholders' Society and the Bengal British India Society. It was also realised that co-operation with the European community in India for common political purposes was not possible. As the Landholders' Society and the Bengal British India Society had some European members, an organisation with exclusive Indian membership was considered desirable. Moreover, some constitutional and administrative changes were anticipated in view of the impending termination of the Company's Charter in 1853.

This is the background of the foundation of the British Indian Association on 31 October 1851, by the amalgamation of the Landholders' Society and the Bengal British India Society. From the very beginning this Association had an all-India outlook; it "kept up a friendly correspondence with the Associations of the sister Presidencies", and its first

Annual Report notes with satisfaction "the formation at Poona, Madras and Bombay successively of associations of a similar character, which, though they have elected to carry on operations independently of each other, cannot but largely contribute towards the important end of acquainting the British public with the state of feeling in India with regard to its past and future administration". During the early years of its existence, the activities of the Association consisted mainly of submission of petitions to the Government and to the British Parliament on public grievances. This policy was based on the conviction that (to quote the words of the Association's Secretary) "there can be no doubt that, when the real state of things is understood, the British Parliament will not long delay justice to India". But the Association was not at all indifferent to broader issues. In its petition to the British Parliament submitted in 1852 it voiced India's demand in the following words: "That it is a most unprecedented circumstance that, though the natives of India have, for the best part of a century, been subjects of the Crown of Great Britain, they have not, to this day been admitted to the smallest share in the administration of the affairs of their country, but have continued under a Government that unites in itself the legislative and executive functions, and avails itself of those powers to make such laws as may subserve its own financial purposes, often without reference to the interests and wishes of the people".<sup>31</sup>

Most of the leaders of the British Indian Association at its early stage were conservative by tradition and temperament—Prasannacoomar Tagore, Radhakanta Deb, Kalikrishna Deb, Satyasan Ghosal—although there were some progressive leaders like Ramgopal Ghosh and Pearychand Mitra. Although its activities embraced the interests of all classes of people, it made occasional efforts to protect the interests of the Zamindars. It has been criticised by two political stalwarts of a later age. Ambika Charan Mazumdar, a Congress President, wrote: "Constructive policy they had

none, and seldom, if ever, they laid down any programme of systematic action for the political advancement of the country".<sup>32</sup> And Bipin Chandra Pal complained that it had failed to cover the country with a net-work of branch societies.<sup>33</sup> These charges cannot be denied; but we must remember that the British Indian Association was, before the Revolt of the Sepoys and the foundation of the Universities, a very tender plant struggling for survival in uncongenial soil. Bengal in 1857 was not prepared for systematic political efforts for the achievement of a well-defined political ideal. There were, however, bold adventurers who could perceive dimly the inevitable trend in India's political evolution. Harish Chandra Mukherjee wrote in *The Hindu Patriot* on 14 January 1858, in connection with the proposal for transferring the government of India to the Crown: "Can a revolution in the Indian Government be authorised by Parliament without consulting the wishes of the vast millions of men for whose benefit it is proposed to be made? The reply must be in the negative.... The time is nearly come when all Indian questions must be solved by Indians".

## NOTE

- (1) B. B. Majumdar : *History of Political Thought*, p.16.
- (2) Quoted by B. B. Majumdar : *op. cit.* , p.18.
- (3) Raja Rammohan Roy : *English Works*, Panini Office, p.461.
- (4) *Ibid.* , p.464.
- (5) *Ibid.* , p.464.
- (6) *Ibid.* , p.266.
- (7) *Ibid.* , p.266.
- (8) B. B. Majumdar : *op. cit.* , pp.41-42.
- (9) Raja Rammohan Roy : *English Works*, p.263.
- (10) *Ibid.* , pp.278-279, 290.
- (11) *Ibid.* , p.446.
- (12) *Ibid.* , p.874.
- (13) Quoted by B. B. Majumdar : *op. cit.* , p.72.
- (14) Raja Rammohan Roy : *English Works*, p.268.
- (15) B. B. Majumdar : *op. cit.* , p.77.
- (16) Raja Rammohan Roy : *English Works*, p.923.
- (17) *Ibid.* , p.925.
- (18) B. B. Majumdar : *op. cit.* , p.79.
- (19) *Life of David Hare* quoted in *Ibid.* , p.82.
- (20) B. B. Majumdar : *op. cit.* , p.84.
- (21) Captain Richardson. He is reported to have shouted in the meeting : "I cannot convert the (Hindu) College into a den of treason." Manmatha Nath Ghosh : *Raja Dakshina Ranjan Mukhopadhyay* (in Bengali) p.70.

- (22) Quoted in *Ibid*, pp.72-74.
- (23) B. B. Majumdar : *op. cit.* , pp.88-91, 109-115.
- (24) A. C. Banerjee : *Indian Constitutional Documents*, I, pp.218-219, 232, 252-254.
- (25) Raja Rammohan Roy : *English Works*, pp. 285, 311.
- (26) B. B. Majumdar : *op. cit.* , pp. 93-96, 103-104.
- (27) His views are not discussed in detail here because a large part of his career falls outside our period.
- (28) B. B. Majumdar : *op. cit.* , pp.160-166.
- (29) He was a member of Adam's British India Society, a leader of the anti-slavery movement and a champion of free trade.
- (30) B. B. Majumdar : *op. cit.* , pp.169-174.
- (31) *Ibid*, pp.177-184, 474-489.
- (32) *Indian National Evolution*, p.7
- (33) *Indian Nationalism*, p.94.



## 13

### PRE-CONGRESS NATIONALISM

(1857-1885)

*Sashi Bhushan Chowdhury*

24 January 1857 is a memorable date in the history of Bengal: it witnessed the foundation of the first Indian University, the University of Calcutta—which eventually became the main means of spreading Western influence. On the same day General Hearsey commanding at Barrackpore reported to the Government the opening episode of the Mutiny. These two events had far-reaching consequence in shaping the destiny of Bengal and of India. The reaction against Western influence on the one hand, and the desire for national assertion on the other, operated to produce what is called the freedom movement in India.

The Western education imparted through the University, and the still earlier Hindu College (Presidency College), instead of fostering a rapprochement had produced a sense of alienation. Even as early as 1858, it was common for those who were educated in English colleges to show aversion against European influence. A study of English and American history and of Western political philosophy generated ideas of freedom and of nationhood in the English-educated classes who felt themselves intellectual peers of the British and resented the domination and tutelage of the latter<sup>1</sup>. That the claim of superiority of the

European elements should be met with a denial, or a counter claim on behalf of Indian culture, was inevitable in the circumstances. A revolt-mentality marked by antipathy to European civilisation as a whole ran parallel to the ideas of political nationalism released by the Mutiny.

The revolt of 1857 was not merely anti-British but a movement expressing profound desires for freedom. Overthrow of the British government was followed in most places of Northern India by establishment of the government of the local chiefs on the old Indian pattern, who in their own way ran the administration of the country and consolidated the results of the upsurge. In this common opposition to the British there was implicit a sense of real unity, a nascent idea of nationalism. The rising of 1857 thus provided an inspiration in the subsequent stages of India's struggle for freedom and echoed whenever the Indians challenged the power of the British by violent or constitutional means.

The main current of Pre-Congress Nationalism in Bengal thus flowed through two different channels, cultural and political. Yet there was a difference in emphasis in respect of the two aspects of the current. The idea of cultural nationalism, *i.e.* the pride of the Indians in their past, was no doubt a widely accepted concept, but the political mood of Bengal was not definitely anti-British. Nationalism in the sense of unification of the country and its freedom from foreign rule was not yet clearly realised. A few years after the Charter Act of 1833 had been passed, Sir Charles Trevelyan observed that whereas at Delhi the people thought in terms of expelling the English and re-establishing an Indian government, in Bengal the educated classes were content with being co-sharers with the British in the administrative field and attaining equality of status with them.<sup>2</sup> Prasannakumar Tagore who flourished during this time gave public expression to this idea, that the day was fast approaching when difference between conquerors and conquered would disappear and Indians would be treated as fellow

subjects of the Crown.<sup>3</sup> This view, which can be termed as pro-British, explains why the Mutiny call failed to evoke any active response from Bengal. The landed aristocracy and other moneyed interests of the country were ranged on the side of the authorities and felt no impulsion of hatred for the English during the hectic days of 1857. In this connection the observation of the famous nationalist leader, Bipin-chandra Pal, merits quotation:

The Sepoy Mutiny particularly in Bengal, left the general population of the country absolutely cold. They had belonged to a generation that had seen and suffered from the anarchy and disorder of the immediate pre-British rule.<sup>4</sup>

The famous poet Iswarchandra Gupta of Bengal even went to the extreme of celebrating the British victory in Cawnpore.

But it just was not true that Bengal submitted to the acquisitive tendencies of the foreigners in the field of trade and industry. The exploitation of the peasantry by the indigo planters in Bengal and the oppressive action which they took to enforce the cultivation of indigo culminated in the mass movement against its cultivation in 1860. The violent and threatening outbreak of the peasants in Pabna and Bogra districts in 1872-73 shook the whole of Bengal. The peasants called themselves *bidrohis* (rebels) and organised themselves in *samitis* to resist the challenge of the European exploiters.<sup>5</sup> Yet, by and large, the Bengal literati felt no strong impulsion to adopt violent means to overthrow the foreign government. The failure of the challenge to British rule in 1857 and the victory of the British against heavy odds, reinforced by the considerations of constitutional propriety, led them to imagine that the proper course would be to obtain a rightful place in the Empire and not to sever the British connection by revolutionary violence. Brahmananda Keshubchandra Sen echoed the same sentiment when he stated: "Let us all unite for the glory of India and for the glory of England..... the

two countries united together in the inscrutable economy of their providence". This being the situation, the effect of the Mutiny in Bengal was that the party of those who advocated constitutional reform, and whose ultimate objective was establishment of the Western form of national government, grew in numbers and strength.

The nationalist movements in the past were confined to separate communities or races; sectional and regional loyalties had still to yield place to all-India feelings of patriotism. In that sense "Nationalism in India is, in effect, a quest for nationhood, a desire for a United India". The literature of Bengal, specially the works of the celebrated novelist Bankimchandra Chatterjee, reflected the spirit of the age. Diffusion of political ideas derived from the West and the impact of the British rule no doubt produced conditions for the unity of the entire country, but the claim of superiority on the part of the English and the wounded feelings of self-esteem, and roused feelings of exasperation of the Indians, were also other factors which gave birth to an opposing sense of national and cultural consciousness. Bankimchandra gave a pointed expression to this idea in coining the word *Jati-baira*, by which he meant a healthy competition with the English, to be their equals in mental and moral qualities but most certainly not to show any repulsion against them and far less to ask them to quit. His mind roamed in the high land of patriotism and yet he never countenanced the idea of winning freedom by driving away the English. Bankim's nationalism was broad-based on the love of the country as a whole, but he went a step further than his contemporaries in envisaging the concept of India as a cultural and racial entity. He fostered the idea of nationalism in the horizon of the politics of Bengal in the pre-Congress period, though his idea of nationalism could not be firmly equated with the nationalist ideas of a later age symbolising Swaraj or self-government.

Apparently enough, nationalist ideas in Bengal in the period immediately preceding the Congress, while advocating

love for the country, did not correspondingly imply defiance of the British as a necessary condition of the attainment of freedom. This is also reflected in the works of a host of writers like Iswarchandra Gupta, Ramgopal Ghosh and others. A feeling of deep love for the country became almost a cult followed with religious fervour. The religious personification of nationalism which we see in Bankim's famous hymn to Goddess Durga is a classic piece of patriotism rationalising religious sentiments. According to Bipinchandra Pal, the mystical significance which Bankim gave to the idea of the motherland

...imparted a new meaning to the current ceremonialism of the country, and multitudes, while worshipping either Jagatdhatri, or Kali, or Durga, accost them with devotion and enthusiasm, with the inspiring cry of *Bande Mataram*..... The transfiguration of these symbols is at once the cause and the evidence of the depth and the strength of the present movement. The wonderful transfiguration of the old gods and goddesses is carrying the message of new nationalism to the women and the masses of the country.<sup>6</sup>

Swami Vivekananda, the chief exponent of Vedantism, struck a still higher note, a little later. He inculcated the view that spiritual awakening was a necessary condition of a rejuvenated national life. The revival of pride in India's culture and greatness of her spiritual and cultural heritage were sedulously preached by him. He also implanted the idea that instead of India learning from Europe, Europe had much to learn from India. Swamiji's brilliant presentation of India's spirituality at Chicago (1893) had a great effect in investing the Indians with a sense of confidence in their past. The cult of India and the religion of nationalism which he preached infused the struggling elements with a new hope and spirit.

But this religious aspect of our nationalism was paralleled and sometimes even eclipsed by a secular trend. There has been a simultaneous attraction for and reaction against the two attitudes, the tendency in one direction or the other being accentuated at different times and swelling in volume from time to time. Already in 1858 the noted Bengali poet, Rangalal Banerjee, struck a strident tone throwing a challenge to those who hugged the chains of slavery. Michael Madhusudan Datta's magnificent *Meghnad-Badh Kabya* brought into prominence this new-founded secular outlook in the heroic character of Indrajit which he treated in an unorthodox and modern manner. The leaven of a bold political outlook gave a new tempo and a spirit of revolt to his works and the same spirit was also reflected in the works of a host of other writers, specially in the columns of the *Hindu Patriot* edited by the famous journalist Harishchandra Mukherjee. The glory of India's past and depth of her present degradation inspired the Bengali anthology of national songs in the pre-Congress period, notably those by Govindachandra Roy and Jatindranath Tagore. The same theme of secularised national outlook with the objectives more akin to the latter ideals of Purna Swaraj found a more articulate expression in the plays produced on the Bengali stages during this period. The institution of Hindu Mela (1867) gave the fullest expression of national sentiment and the theme of freedom. The Wahabi upsurge and the state trial of Wahabi leaders in 1864 quickened the political consciousness of the people and the great Bengali Bipinchandra Pal seemed to have felt the pulsation of a new life and a genuine ache for national regeneration from that time. All these led to the emergence of a forward school who seemed to have set on foot a different movement aiming at a quicker approach to the goal by violent means. Talks of secret societies on the Italian *Carbonari* model were quite common and were encouraged by distinguished leaders of public life like Rajnarayan Bose and Dwijendranath Tagore. It is also noteworthy that in

1874 Bholanath Chandra proposed boycott of British goods and anticipated an action like passive resistance.<sup>7</sup>

Thus by the seventies the nationalist idea had become crystalised; it meant the reunification of the people of India on the basis of common political interest and aspiration. The movement now found its foremost exponent in the person of Surendranath Banerjee, a treasury by himself of political thought. A political disciple of Gladstone and an ardent admirer of Burke, he was the product of a new dynamic nationalism which the noble passion of Mazzini and the patriotic prowess of Garibaldi inspired. It was the time when Young Bengal read Mazzini as eagerly as the present generation are reading Karl Marx. Surendranath translated the works of Mazzini in Bengali and popularised him amongst the young members of the intelligentsia. This high level of patriotic ideal was also fostered and reinforced by political associations which had for some years been coming into existence. The Indian Association which Surendranath succeeded in establishing on 26 July 1876 with the assistance of the young Brahmo leaders like Anandamohan Bose and Dwarkanath Ganguly was symbolic of the aspirations of the people of Bengal and ruled public opinion from Peshwar to Chittagong.<sup>8</sup> As Surendranath stated: "The idea that was working in our minds was that the Association was to be the centre of an all-India movement. For even then, the conception of a united India, derived from the inspiration of Mazzini, or at any rate of bringing all India upon the same common political platform, had taken firm possession of the Indian leaders in Bengal".<sup>9</sup>

Another association called the Indian League of which the moving spirits were Sisirkumar Ghose, Sambhuchandra Mukherjee and Motilal Ghose had been started<sup>10</sup> even earlier but it soon joined the Indian Association. The Nationalist Movement spread with the Indian Association serving as a centralising agency. The question of reduction of age limit for entrance to the Indian Civil Service created a wave of

excitement in the country. A meeting of the Indian Association, held on 24 March 1877, in the Town Hall of Calcutta under the presidency of Maharaja Narendra Krishna Bahadur, organised an all-India national protest against it by uniting the provinces "through a sense of common grievance and aspiration of a common resolve".<sup>11</sup> Surendranath's tours in Northern India (1877) and Western and Southern India (1878) in this connection were attended with great success. This has been rightly acclaimed as "the first successful attempt of its kind at uniting India on a political basis". From that time Indian opinion had begun to be recognised as a power with which the government had to reckon.<sup>12</sup>

Lord Lytton's disastrous rule brought ruin to India.<sup>13</sup> His imposition of the infamous Vernacular Press Act and Arms Act (1878) was bitterly resented by the Indians.<sup>14</sup> He provoked a war with Afghanistan and relentlessly pursued it with the money extorted from the poor *ryots*. This led to the agrarian anti-tax riot in the Deccan. "The State of things at the end of Lord Lytton's reign", as William Wedderburn told Blunt, "was bordering upon a revolution".<sup>15</sup> Lord Ripon's arrival however kindled a new hope and gave a great stimulus to the revival of public activities.

An extra-ordinary stimulus to Indian Nationalism came from the Ilbert Bill (1882) which attempted to abolish the judicial disqualifications based on race distinction. As the Europeans in India started agitation against this change the Indians reacted to the challenge. Meetings and petitions became common and the art of agitation was introduced with all the Western machinery. Rancour and animosity became common and a section of the vernacular press carried on a kind of journalistic vendetta against the European elements. Lord Ripon was eventually obliged to come to a compromise which meant the abandonment of the principle of the Bill. This episode not only left a rankling sense of humiliation on the minds of the educated Indians, but also let loose a national avalanche in Bengal referring to which



Blunt wrote in his private diary that a catastrophe was in the air.<sup>16</sup> Cry of revolution had caught the imagination of even responsible leaders like Surendranath Banerjee. Blunt's talks with Anandamohan Bose, Secretary of the National Conference, also revealed that the danger of the upsurge was very great as the people were losing confidence in Lord Ripon's administration. Bose said that a spark may at any time fire the train. The imprisonment of Surendranath on a charge of contempt of Court had also excited indignation throughout the country (Banerjee was convicted for two months, 1883, May—July). In fact he had become the idol of the youth of the country. Leaders of the Indian Association were shrewd enough not to allow the universal awakening that followed the Ilbert Bill agitation and Surendranath's imprisonment to slip by.

Taking advantage of the International Exhibition scheduled to be held in Calcutta in December 1883, leaders of the Indian Association called a National Conference in Calcutta from 28 December to 30 December 1883. This National Conference, the first of its kind in India, may rightly be regarded as a predecessor of the Indian National Congress to be started later in 1885. The conference seems to have been quite successful and was regarded by the Secretary, Anandamohan Bose, as the first step towards a real national organisation.

Nine months before the conference had met, a noble-minded Scotsman, Allan Octavian Hume, who came to be regarded later as the 'father' of the Indian National Congress, had addressed an open letter (1 March 1883) to the graduates of the Calcutta University as largely representing the educated community of India<sup>17</sup>. As the worthy son of the founder of the radical party in England, he was essentially democratic in his instincts. His kind and considerate treatment of the people of Etawah during the dark days of the Mutiny had endeared him throughout the Punjab. Hume viewed with deep concern the tremendous unrest during the closing years

of Lord Lytton's Viceroyalty. He had special sources to know about the condition of the country and wrote that if nothing was done to counteract this unrest it would spell danger to British rule in India. Wedderburn tells us that Hume came across 7 large volumes containing a vast number of communications from over 30,000 reporters from different parts of India on the prevailing public discontent in India and he remarked that when the fire would start it would spread wonderfully in this combustible atmosphere.<sup>18</sup>

Hume was determined to provide a safety valve for the escape of this "great and growing force". After some anxious thought he reached the conclusion that the solution of this fateful problem lay in the association of the 'natives' in the management of their own affairs, in directing this popular impulse on which he had such alarming evidence into an innocuous channel. The soul-stirring letter which he wrote to the graduates of the Calcutta University bespeaks of the psychological knowledge of the shrewd Scotsman. He wanted the educated people to come forward and warned them that if 50 persons with sufficient love for and pride in their country, sufficient genuine patriotism to take initiative and sacrifice their lives to the cause, could not be available then there was no hope for India. "Let the yoke gall your shoulders never so sorely until we realise and stand prepared to act upon the eternal truth that, whether in the case of the individuals or nations, self-sacrifice and unselfishness are the only unfailing guide to freedom and happiness".

Many politically conscious Indians were also inclining towards the thought of an all-India organisation as early as 1883, as is evident from the letters of Tarapada Banerjee which appeared in the *Indian Mirror*.<sup>19</sup> Tarapada had suggested on 4 July 1883 a meeting of delegates from all India at Calcutta. Later on he suggested a scheme for having a permanent delegate in England to represent India and agitate there for the redress of the grievances of the Indians. Kristodas Pal had also expressed similar views. Hume him-

self in his speech at a public meeting in Allahabad (30 April 1888) modestly disclaimed his own single authorship of the idea of the Congress.

It is surprising that Surendranath Banerjee, the recognised leader of Bengal who had played such an important role in the national awakening, does not figure among the founders of the Congress. He could not attend the first session of the Congress in Bombay though an invitation was extended to him by the President W. C. Bonerjee. It appears that it was not possible for him to suspend the second session of the National Conference (1885) called to Calcutta, as he had a large share in this organisation. He deliberately kept himself in the background, as he stated in his autobiography, in view of his removal from the government service. There were also rumours, as stated by Karkaria, that Lord Dufferin intended on his arrival to follow a coercive policy in Bengal. Dufferin's attack on the dress of the deputation of the Indian Association led by Banerjee at the Government House is further proof of the Viceroy's displeasure. But the way in which the Indian Association led by Surendranath, though first in the field, gave way to the newly founded organisation in the interest of the nation speaks well of the great Bengali leader. The founders of the Congress, who were men of moderate views, also perhaps thought that it would not be advisable to arouse hostility of the Government by aligning with the leader of an association to which the Government was not well disposed.

#### NOTE

- (1) P. Nolan: *History of the British Empire in India and the East*, p.326.
- (2) Trevelyan: *On the Education of the People in India* (1828), p.197.
- (3) J. K. Majumdar: *Indian Speeches and Documents on British Rule*, pp.49-50.
- (4) *Memories of My Life and Time*, Vol. II.
- (5) Natarajan: *Peasant Uprisings in India*.
- (6) Bipinchandra Pal: *The Spirit of Nationalism*, p.36.
- (7) H. N. Mukherji in *New Age*, August 1957, p.21.
- (8) H. J. S. Cotton: *New India*, p.19 ;  
*History of Indian Association*, p. 58.
- (9) S. N. Banerjee: *A Nation in Making*, pp.41,43.

(10) There seems to have been local associations in existence on the eve of the birth of the Congress in all the big cities of India : in Agra, Allahabad, Farakkabad, Lucknow (Bagal, *History of the Indian Association*, pp.19-20) ; in Ambala, Dera Ismail Khan, Dibrugar, Ferozepur, Gujranwala, Madras, Shillong, Silchar, and Surat. More famous of the associations started in Bengal were the Barisal People's Association, the Dacca People's Association, Rajshahi Association, and the Indian Union at Calcutta (*Proc. Home Public*, App. '1888, Nos. 173-75,364).

(11) *A Nation in Making*, p.44.

(12) G. Smith: *Twelve Indian Statesmen*, p.308.

(13) Andrews and Mukherjee: *Rise and Growth of the Congress*, p.88.

(14) *Renascent India*, p.103.

(15) *India under Ripon*, p.216.

(16) *Ibid.*, p.216.

(17) A. C. Majumdar, pp.46-47.

(18) Wedderburn, *Hume*, pp.80-81.

(19) *Rise and Growth of the Congress*, p.125.

## 14

### CONGRESS IN BENGAL

(1885-1920)

*Jogesh Chandra Bagal*

One may legitimately ask what is meant by 'Congress in Bengal'?—Congress activities, Congress movements, or those leading events that contributed to the origin and development of the Congress ideals in Bengal? I propose to place some bare facts before my readers, which will go a long way to meet these questionings of theirs. Truly speaking, Bengal's contribution to Congress ideals and ideology is immense. Her endeavours at their fulfilment began even before the birth of the Indian National Congress. These are varied and original, and covered a previous period of more than half a century.

The idea of Indian nationhood on the political plane was not a new thing to the educated Bengalis of mid-nineteenth century. The Bengal British India Society of Calcutta broached the idea of one Indian nation so far back as the forties. The British Indian Association, also of Calcutta, launched a movement for bringing the people of the various British territories of India on one political platform in the fifties. Brahmananda Keshub Chandra Sen's travels in Southern and Northern India on a religious mission in the mid-sixties convinced him of Indian unity also on a political basis. He emphasised this aspect strongly in one of his

lectures before the Bethune Society and went so far as to say that the Society very appropriately might supply the nucleus of a real all-India socio-political organisation. It was perhaps from this national point of view that Keshub Chandra prefixed the meaningful term 'Indian' to his religion and its organisation.

Governmental interference in almost every aspect of our public life—economic, educational, social as well as administrative—had gradually estranged the educated section of the community, and they began to start political associations in different parts of the Province in the early seventies. These associations required proper guidance, and to supply this desideratum the Indian League was established in Calcutta. But the League fell far short of the democratic basis, which was then the urgent need for rallying the newly educated; and this need was fully met by the Indian Association, started in 1876, one year after the Indian League, under more favourable auspices and on more democratic basis. One thing should be noted here about the nomenclature of these—the Indian League and the Indian Association. Educated Bengal had by this time been imbued with the idea of Indian nationhood, so strongly advocated by Keshub Chandra Sen. They were no longer satisfied with 'British Indian'. Their 'India' included not only the British Indian subjects, but also those living in Native or Feudatory States. They, however, commenced work for the latter long afterwards. But that the idea was there cannot be overlooked or gainsaid.

The Indian Association was founded on 26 July 1876. Broad-based on democratic principles, the Association attracted the elite of the city as well as the common educated people to its side. The patriotic object of the Association envisaged popular movements amongst the various Indian communities, especially the Muhammedans and the Hindus, and the association of the masses with our national movement was emphasised by the leaders of the newly-formed

body. Bankim Chandra, the great novelist, fully conscious of its importance, blessed the Association for its noble object and helped its leaders when needed. Under the leadership of Surendra Nath Banerji, the Indian Association adopted various ways and means to rouse political consciousness throughout the length and breadth of the country. Branch Associations were started all over Bengal, and in Northern India upto Lahore. In the South, Bombay and Madras had political organisations of their own which also adopted the ideal and objects of the Association.

The Indian Association conducted an agitation on the Civil Service question throughout India, and organised representative meetings to protest against such anti-national governmental measures as the Vernacular Press Act, the Arms Act, and the cotton duty. The excise policy of the government, detrimental to social welfare, also came under fire. Not satisfied with agitation and protests here, the Association took the initiative to send an Indian delegate to England to seek redress of our grievances by educating the British public on Indian questions. Such Liberal leaders as Bright and Gladstone became thereby more interested in Indian questions. The Liberal leaders took advantage of the situation in the ensuing General Elections (1880). They went so far as to include redress of Indian grievances in their election programme. The presence of the Association's delegate in England was very helpful to the British Liberals at this time. The Liberal Party won the Elections. The Cabinet, formed under the leadership of Gladstone, immediately sent the Liberal Lord Ripon as Viceroy of India. The first gracious act of Lord Ripon after his taking up the reins of Indian Government was the repeal of the Vernacular Press Act.

This and other similar successes induced the leaders and members of the Association to bestow attention on other national matters. They had already started movements for introducing local self-government on a liberal basis, which,

they thought, would be the actual training ground for representative or national government for India. They contacted the masses with regard to two vital subjects but not always without serious opposition. The Association sent delegates to villages to acquaint themselves with their wants and needs. They began to advocate the immediate reform of the land-tenure system which had reduced the *ryots* to 'helots' in their own country. In this matter they met with serious opposition from the Zemindars and landlords. Again, while conducting agitation in the villages for the prevention of the liquor traffic and manufacture, they had to fight hard against the addicted persons and the liquor manufacturers as also the local officers. In this way the Indian Association worked for the people and with the people for our national improvement and political progress for almost a decade, and when the Indian National Congress was ushered into existence in 1885, the Association of Calcutta had already a network of political organisations in the country, through whose activities the people were being awakened to a sense of their nationality.

And this sense of nationality had already found considerable shape and expression in two National Conferences, the first organised by the Indian Association alone and the second by the Indian Association and other political bodies of Calcutta conjointly. Both the Conferences were 'national' in the true sense, because of their representative character and the character of the resolutions passed therein. The main resolution of both the Conferences speaks of the immediate need for the establishment of representative government in India for the solution of national and social grievances. Other resolutions, *viz.* the repeal of the Arms Act and the separation of judiciary from the executive, aroused much interesting discussion. The second National Conference and the first session of the Indian National Congress were held almost simultaneously, but one after another. Resolutions mooted in the Congress were, we find, strictly on the lines of the resolutions adopted in these National Conferences. And



this could not but be. We have it on the authority of Surendra Nath Banerji, the principal organiser of these conferences, that he supplied the proceedings of the first National Conference on request to Kasi Dutt Trambak Telang of Bombay and the resolutions of the first Congress were drawn up in the light of those passed in the Conference. We can safely say that the Indian National Congress took its cue from at least the first National Conference held in Calcutta. It is a pity that the official history of the Congress makes no mention at all of this first National Conference, and dismisses the second National Conference only in a short paragraph of eleven lines.

## 2

We are not concerned here with the history of the origin of the Indian National Congress. Allan Octavian Hume, the real 'father' of the Congress, conceived the idea of establishing a social organisation on an all-India basis. But it was after his consultation with Viceroy Lord Dufferin that he induced himself to start an organisation which would serve as an opposition to the Government as is done in the British Parliament. The people had become restive and the Government adamant. This organisation would, therefore, serve as a 'safety-valve' to both. This, if not contrary to, fell far short of the object and principles of the Indian Association, and it is no wonder that such popular and progressive leaders as Surendra Nath Banerji, Ananda Mohan Bose and Sisir Kumar Ghose were not properly invited by the prime-movers of the Congress. But when the second session of the Congress had to be held in Calcutta and Hume came to the city to make previous arrangements, he found to his surprise and dismay that no session could be held here without the active co-operation of this advanced group of politicians. Leaders of the Indian Association headed by Surendra Nath Banerji and Ananda Mohan Bose came to his rescue and along with others and the rank and file strove hard to make the session a complete success. The conservative leaders of the British

Indian Association also joined this session and their President, Raja Rajendralal Mitra, was the Chairman of the Reception Committee.

Since its second session the Bengali progressive leaders threw themselves heart and soul in the Indian National Congress. Bipin Chandra Pal says in his autobiography that the distinct character of old Bengali nationalism was almost lost in the new activities of the Congress. Surendra Nath Banerji, embodiment of the national upsurge in Bengal, committed political *harikiri*, so says Bipin Chandra. The Congress followed strictly an all-India political programme. And the leaders did not allow even the resolution on the miseries of the tea-garden labourers sponsored by the Bengal delegates on the ground of its local character! This reverse was responsible for inducing the Bengali leaders to start a provincial organisation, called the Bengal Provincial Conference, for the discussion of local subjects, keeping the Congress objective in view. The first session of this Conference was held in the middle of 1887 under the presidentship of Dr. Mahendra Lal Sircar, the great homœopath and founder of the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science. It discussed threadbare the question of tea-garden labourers and averred that it was not at all a provincial subject, because the labourers used to be recruited from Bihar, U. P., C. P. and Madras. Other provinces, such as Bombay and Madras, followed the Bengal lead and founded provincial organisations for the discussion of local matters and redress of local grievances.

The Congress and the Conferences were but annual functions and the leaders remained most of the time busy with their respective professional duties. But what about the political work throughout the year? Bengal was far ahead of the other provinces in respect of such political work. Since its inception, the Indian Association had carried on such activity throughout the year, centrally as well as through its branches everywhere. Though its leaders became active

members of the Congress, still they retained its separate entity during the late eighties and the whole of the nineties. Shorn of its all-India character, the Association gradually concentrated on work for the good of the local people. The Congress held its sessions in different parts of Calcutta in 1890, 1896 and 1901. The educated section of the community rallied round the Congress and tried their utmost to make the sessions a success. It was in its Calcutta session of 1896 that an industrial exhibition was for the first time organised as an appendage of the Congress. The Congress exhibition of 1901 was held on a bigger scale. These exhibitions, thanks to Bengal's initiative, became an annual adjunct to the Congress. They gave a filip to the industrial progress of the country.

In the Amraoti Congress of 1897, Aswini Kumar Dutt of Barisal strongly denounced it as a "three days' *tamasha*". During the year Aswini Kumar had been able to send a petition to the British Parliament with forty thousand signatures, urging for the early introduction of the representative system of government in India. The signatories included peasants, weavers, carpenters, small traders, that is to say, the commonalty. Association of the masses is essential for any political campaign to be effective. Its lack in the Congress had not escaped the vigilant eye of the great Bankim Chandra. Though he welcomed the Congress organisation as an important factor for national unity, he could not but regret its reluctance to associate the masses with its work.

But this defect in the Congress was partially removed in Bengal by the province-wide activities of the Indian Association. It should be noted that the all-India character of the Association had already been usurped by the Congress. With a network of branch associations spreading all over the province, the Association conducted social welfare work, and in time of famine, flood and pestilence, its members at once volunteered their services for the relief and succour to the afflicted and affected people. The principal defect in the

Congress programme was removed to some extent in this way. The Bengal Provincial Conference, though primarily an annual function, served also to remove this defect of want of mass-contacts by its political propaganda before and after the actual sessions. Even some younger members of the Congress, such as, Bipin Chandra Pal and Aswini Kumar Dutt, toured amongst the masses in the districts for the propagation of the Congress objectives. The Bengal Provincial Conference was holding its annual sessions in Calcutta upto the year 1894, and that was also not regular. Importance of the contact with the people of the country, in matters political, was however being keenly felt by the Bengal leaders, and since 1895 they began to hold the sessions in the districts; or to be more accurate, in the district head-quarters.

There was a President for the plenary session, a Reception Committee as well as a Chairman. Resources of the provincial body being limited, the members of the Reception Committee toured the villages with volunteers, acquainted the people with their political and economic condition and thereby made them interested in our national affairs. This sort of political education continued at least six months before the actual session would start. The first Conference held in the mofussil was at Berhampore, the district town of Murshidabad, under the presidentship of Ananda Mohan Bose. The second such Conference was held at Krishnagar (Nadia) and the third at Natore and so on. It was at the Natore session that a new element in the progressive school of thought made its influence felt, and with this element we find the poet Rabindra Nath Tagore. In the Provincial Conference, when the people of Bengal would meet, the medium of discussions must reasonably and necessarily be their mother-tongue Bengali; this demand was conceded to in this session for the first time in the life of Congress and Conferences. Rabindra Nath translated the presidential address of Satyendra Nath Tagore in his inimitable Bengali before the Bengali audience. Thanks to Bengali initiative, the latter-day freedom movement gathered momentum because of the free use of

the provincial languages in political parlance. Upto 1901, the Conference travelled, as it were, at least seven districts, and the Bengali masses received sufficient political education. Bengal was practically going ahead of the Congress movement.

It may not be out of the way to refer to another aspect of Bengal politics. The Bengali Congressmen, whenever opportunities arose, extended their generous hand to those in distress or trouble in other provinces. Bengal stood as one man behind Lokamanya Balgangadhar Tilak of the Bombay Presidency while he was prosecuted on a charge of sedition in 1897. Jogesh Chandra Chaudhury, Bar-at-Law, an ardent Congressman of youthful energy, travelled all the way to Bombay with sufficient funds to help Tilak in his hour of distress. Thus Bengal and Bombay joined together for working out our political destiny.

## 3

The twentieth century dawned in Bengal with fresh hopes and new visions. We have already seen that Bengal politics had retained a distinct and progressive character even on the constitutional plane. But Government's antagonistic die-hard policy continued, and repression and subtle methods of coercion prevented the natural growth of nationalism. With her age-old tradition of nationalism, Bengal's approach to the solution of political problems took a distinct turn with the beginning of the new century. During the previous decade our authors and publicists had directed the attention of the people not only to the anomaly of our political work in the face of heartless die-hards of the Government in their writings, but they also preached the virtue of self-help so as to be able to fight against the severe odds before them. It was admitted on all hands that the Bengali people were more self-conscious than those of the other provinces and they took the lead in all national matters. Viceroy Lord Curzon was shrewd enough to understand this, and the first and foremost object of his regime was to stifle Indian nationalism at its

fountain head. His nefarious policy had its start first in 1899 in crippling the Calcutta Corporation amidst tremendous opposition. His inimical attitude found another expression in pernicious measures against higher education in Bengal. The third and the most mischievous action was the partitioning of Bengal. His determination first came to be known in late 1903, but it took two years to mature the scheme of partition.

The Indian National Congress, of course, did not sit idle. In its three successive sessions at Madras (1903), Bombay (1904), and Benares (1905), serious notice was taken of the underlying machination of Viceroy Lord Curzon. In the first two sessions, resolutions were passed asking the Viceroy to drop the proposal altogether, as it would wound the feelings of the Bengali people and interfere with their ethnological, cultural and social cohesion. The proposal was a *fait accompli* when the Congress met at Benares under the presidency of Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the Marhatta patriot-politician. A man of moderate temperament, even Gokhale could not help using strong language while criticising the administrative vagaries of Lord Curzon. The Boycott movement had already gained momentum in Bengal, and the Congress passed a resolution warning the Government of its far-reaching consequences. They implored the British Government both here and abroad to withdraw the measure and restore the province to its *status quo*, until a *via media* for better administration was found. But time had shown that mere criticism and paper resolutions from the Congress platform were of no avail to the effected province. Nor would the adamant rulers pay any heed to them unless forced by circumstances to do otherwise.

Meanwhile what were the Bengali people doing? As I have already referred to, with the dawn of the twentieth century new hopes and visions found a permanent habitat in the minds of the educated section of the Bengali race. The successful boycott of the foreign goods by the Chinese,

the reverses in the Boer War suffered by the mighty Britisher, and the rise of Japan in the East imbued them with new hopes and aspiration. Prince Okakura of Japan, the great literateur and art-critic, preached the cult of Asia for Asians. He wrote a book in which he forcibly proved the superiority of Asia's art, architecture, and also her far-advanced religious thought, embalmed in various literatures of the East. And also here in Bengal, the spirit of self-help was being cultivated with renewed zeal. From the sphere of thinking and writing, Bengal had entered the region of action. Swadeshi stores were opened in Calcutta, and volunteers were sent to the districts to popularise country-made goods. Even Rabindra Nath Tagore, the apostle of India's nationalism and culture, started a Swadeshi cloth-shop in Calcutta with the help of his nephew Balendra Nath Tagore. Jogesh Chandra Chaudhury, Satish Chandra Mukherji and Sarala Debi (later, Sarala Debi Chaudhurani) organised the *Swadeshi Bhandar* for the same purpose. Few of us, perhaps, are aware that Pramatha Nath Bose, better known today as the discoverer of the Gurumahisani (modern Jamshedpur) iron-ores, had taken the initiative in organising industrial conferences and exhibitions in the nineties of the last century.

The spirit of self-help also found adequate form and expression in the spheres of our literary and physical education. And these grew in importance with the advance of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal. Rabindra Nath had previously criticised the current system of English education in the country. Not satisfied with criticising only, he himself founded an ideal educational centre at Santiniketan, Birbhum, on a strictly Indian basis. Upadhyay Brahmabandhab started a similar school in Calcutta. These were the pioneers of the national schools and colleges of the Swadeshi days. Under the leadership of P. Mitra, Barrister-at-Law, the Anushilan Samity attracted youths to its side for physical culture and education individually. Jatindra Nath Banerjee (later known as Swami Niralamba) came down to

Bengal under advice from Aurobindo Ghose of Baroda and joined the Samity; Barindra Kumar Ghose later joined it. The Anushilan Samity supplied the nucleus of the latter-day revolutionary movement in Bengal. Sarala Debi also founded a gymnasium for the physical regeneration of the Bengali youth at her father's residence in Old Ballygunge, Calcutta. On the lines of the Ganapati and Shivaji festivals in Maharashtra, Sarala Debi initiated the Pratapaditya and Udayaditya *utsava* in her own province. She introduced the *Beerashtami Brata* (a vow to be taken on the Durga Puja Mahashtami day). She did all these in order to inspire the younger generation of her countrymen with true patriotism and love of service. The Congress was some times approached for making some arrangements for the physical education of the people, but to no purpose.

In his famous *Swadeshi Samaj*, Rabindra Nath Tagore formulated a scheme, based on self-help, embodying the individual piecemeal endeavours. "Let our rulers govern our country in their own way, but we must stand on our own legs and do things ourselves according to our choice and needs". Education, sanitation, water-supply, road-making, industrial pursuits, arbitration, and so on, were subjects included in the scheme. This cult of self-help has come to be known as the New Spirit. And Rabindra Nath Tagore, Upadhyay Brahmabandhab, Sister Nivedita, Satis Chandra Mukherjee and Bipin Chandra Pal were the prominent exponents of the New Spirit. This New Spirit also found vent in the Bengal Provincial Conference on different occasions. At its Burdwan session in 1904, President Ashutosh Chaudhury uttered this meaningful dictum—"A subject race has no politics". This had elicited both praise and criticism from various sections. In the face of the bureaucratic vagaries this utterance showed which way the wind then blew. This new outlook of the Bengali people began to find expression on the platform of the Congress, but its influence could not be felt till at the Benares session.



During the first five years of the new century, Congress in Bengal means the working of this New Spirit. I have dwelt at some length on different aspects of this New Spirit. Rabindra Nath sang the message of the New Spirit in poetry. Bipin Chandra Pal explained every week in his *New India* the different aspects of the New Spirit to the common educated folk. The proposal of Lord Curzon could not be tolerated by the people of Bengal who had been imbued with the New Spirit.

A Conference was held in January 1905, when delegates from the districts assembled. H. J. S. Cotton, President of the Bombay Congress session (Dec. 1904), came down to Calcutta to preside over the Conference. The conference protested vehemently against the partition proposal of Lord Curzon, who had persisted in his nefarious tactics in spite of the protests of the Bengalis as also from the Congress. A memorandum was sent to the Secretary of State asking him not to approve of this unwanted measure. But nothing would deter Lord Curzon. He sat tight over his proposed measure for five months more, and nobody could have a peep into his mind. It received the seal of approval on 19 July 1905. The Bengalis now knew, to their surprise and dismay, that Bengal was going to be partitioned on 16 October following.

They determined to resist the partition. Leaders met and conferred. A mammoth public meeting was held at Town Hall, Calcutta, on 7 August 1905. Manindra Chandra Nandi presided over the meeting. Narendra Nath Sen, the veteran editor of the *Indian Mirror*, moved the now-famous Boycott Resolution which was passed amidst universal acclamation. Bengal had already been inspired with the Swadeshi cult. Since this memorable day she launched a movement which also won the appellation of the Swadeshi movement.

## 4

The Swadeshi movement continued for seven years (1905-1911). It has got a chequered, and none the less, interesting

career. I am not concerned here with a detailed account of this movement. The Indian National Congress could not rise above its usual procedure of work. Bengal's misery did not move the hearts of its leaders to adopt a new active course. The Bengal leaders, Surendra Nath Banerjee and others, considered partition of Bengal as a national calamity. They alone plunged into the struggle against the die-hard bureaucracy. They had one main objective when they resolved upon boycotting British goods. And that was to bring the British people and the British Government to their senses regarding the consequences of the nefarious measure. In hundreds of meetings, attended by thousands of people, the Boycott Resolution was passed and the Swadeshi vow (to use only home-made articles) taken. The boycott agitation spread to the educational institutions too. Students left their schools and colleges everywhere. This unexpected upheaval bewildered the bureaucracy, and they found no means at hand to resist it. They resorted to repression. At first the Hindus and Mussalmans stood as one man against the measure. Lord Curzon and Sir Bamfylde Fuller, his *bona fide* henchman in the newly formed province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, used all possible methods to estrange one community from the other. And that they were successful is now a historical fact.

Bengal's partition soldered the old and the new schools of thought. Really speaking, if left alone, Bengal would not have more than one party. Even after the break of the Moderates from the Extremists on the platform of the Indian National Congress, these two sections joined hands together not only to fight partition, but also for the redress of local grievances as also for the political, economic, social and cultural advancement of the Bengalis. The policy of repression and oppression adopted by the Government here and its tacit support by the British Government gave rise to a new party, later known as the revolutionary party of Bengal, whose declared object was independence of Mother India for the attainment of which object it would not

hesitate to use arms. This trend was kept secret for obvious reasons. Some of this party have told us that they were fortunate enough to receive help both from the Moderates and the Extremists. The revolutionary outlook of this section had been nurtured in the gymnastic clubs and *samities*, already referred to. The wrath of this group accumulated, and it sought to make its way out just after the break-up of the Bengal Provincial Conference at Barisal in April 1906.

This Conference at Barisal had a special significance in the history of our freedom movement. Repression had already set in in different parts of Bengal in various degrees. But that resorted to at Barisal was unique in its character. Lathi-charge on the volunteer-processionists, and even the bloodshed involved could not satisfy the henchmen of the bureaucracy, the all-mighty police; the leader of Bengal, Surendra Nath Banerjee, was arrested and immediately presented before the magistrate. After the farce of a trial the magistrate fined him five hundred rupees on two counts. I should say here that this sort of trial was later severely condemned by the High Court, and the fine had to be refunded. The Conference, however, met as scheduled under the presidentship of Abdul Rasul, who had led the procession but not been arrested. Surendra Nath's return to the Conference after some time and the narration of the successive incidents as well as the presentation of the wounded volunteers could not but produce an effect, hitherto unthinkable. The audience received them not only with acclamation, but their faces expressed a determination to fight the enemy to the last. Motilal Ghose, Editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, moved the famous resolution on self-help and self-reliance for the redress of the grievances; the people would on no account apply for redress to a Government which had lost its 'civilised' character. The bureaucracy could not even tolerate the peaceful Conference session. The utter disgust of the people, they broke up the Conference.

Besides the revolutionary party, two other parties made their appearance on an all-India plane in 1906, later called

'Moderates' and 'Extremists'. The Moderates allied themselves with the old leadership of the Congress. The Extremists expounded the view that India stands for complete autonomy unfettered by any outside influence and free from British rule. Boycott and passive resistance were the two means for the attainment of this national objective. Bipin Chandra Pal, the first editor of *Bande Mataram*, explained the impact of this new objective in the press and on the platform. Aurobindo Ghose, next editor of the paper, also expounded these methods in all their bearings. This view found support all over India. Lokamanya Balgangadhar Tilak of Maharashtra and Lala Lajpat Rai of the Punjab whole-heartedly supported this objective and started explaining it in their own way. The Congress was to be held in Calcutta in December 1906. Scenting the differences and to avoid any opposition, the Reception Committee elected Dadabhai Naoroji as President of this year's Congress. He was respected by all, and nobody took any exception to his election.

Though the advanced group, the Extremists, could not have a say in the election of the President, they succeeded considerably in getting their objective included in the Congress programme in the form of an all-comprehensive resolution. Their objection to allowing foreign articles in the Congress Exhibition was also indirectly granted. The Exhibition was not given the appellation of a 'Congress Exhibition'. The organisers, all veteran Congressmen, got it opened by Viceroy Lord Minto who emphasised the difference between 'honest Swadeshi' and 'Boycott'. President Dadabhai Naoroji kept himself abreast of the advanced views of the new school of thought. He emphatically pronounced in his presidential address the Congress objective or ideal as the early attainment of Swaraj. He of course explained it as a form of government on the line of the British dominions under the British Crown. This declaration on the part of the President went a long way to conciliate the advanced group of politicians, the Extremists. The all-important resolution runs as follows:

"Self-Government: Resolved that this Congress is of opinion that the system of government obtaining in the self-governing British colonies should be extended to India, and that, as steps leading to it, it urges that the following reforms should be immediately carried out:

- (a) All examinations held in England only should be simultaneously held in India and in England, and that all higher appointments which are made in India should be by competitive examination only;
- (b) The adequate representation of Indians in the Council of the Secretary of State and the Executive Councils of the Viceroy and of the Governors of Madras and Bombay;
- (c) The expansion of the Supreme and Provincial Legislative Councils, allowing a larger and truly effective representation of the people and a larger control on the financial and executive administration of the country;
- (d) The powers of local and municipal bodies should be extended and official control over them should not be more than which is exercised by the Local Government Board in England over similar bodies."

Bengal suffered severely at the hands of the hard-hearted bureaucracy from 1907 to 1909. Newspapers were suppressed, editors and printers jailed, leaders imprisoned. Special wrath of the Government fell upon the youths of Bengal, who were belaboured and arrested in hundreds. Even young urchins fell victims to official anger.

Estrangement of relations between the Moderates and the Extremists reached the breaking point at the Surat Session of the Indian National Congress in 1907. The two groups parted company, not to meet again till 1916. 1908 was prolific with a plethora of official acts, namely, the Explosives

Act, Seditious Meetings Act, Press Act, etc. Lajpat Rai had been exiled and Bipin Chandra Pal jailed in 1907. Lok. Bal-gangadhar Tilak was imprisoned for six years on a charge of sedition in 1908. Those of the revolutionary group were arrested, including Aurobindo Ghose, and sent for trial. Their trial is known in history as the Alipur Bomb Case. Nine public men, some of whom were universally respected, were arrested under the obsolete Act III of 1818 and sent to unknown destinations. Bengal was greatly disturbed. Not satisfied with these acts of oppression and repression, the Government sought to conciliate the Moderates and leave the Extremists alone in the wilderness by a proposal to introduce partial self-government in the country. The Moslems were sought to be alienated from the Hindus, and now the Moderates from the Extremists. 'Divide and rule' became the basis of Indian governance.

But so far as Bengal's partition was concerned, both the groups worked jointly for years. The Indian Association and the Bengal Provincial Conference were the two institutions where they constantly met and conferred for the solution of Bengal's problems. At the Bengal Provincial Conference held at Pabna in 1908, Rabindra Nath Tagore implored his countrymen to take to the programme of constructive work from his presidential chair, forgetting personal and party differences. Till the annulment of partition in 1911, this question received top priority in their deliberations. Partition was at last annulled and the people rejoiced. But the Bengal revolutionaries would not stop their activities for this small mercy. They sometimes went underground, and worked incessantly for the attainment of their objective.

## 5

The truncated Congress held its annual sessions in different parts of the country from 1908. Its twenty-sixth session was organised in Calcutta in December 1911. Ramsay MacDonald, later Prime Minister of Great Britain, was to be the President of this session. But due to the death of his

wife he could not come to India. His place was taken by Pandit Bishnu Narayan Dhar, the U.P. leader. The annulment of partition had induced a considerable number of Bengali people to attend the session. Some of the leaders of the Extremist group attended the session in their private capacity. Poet Rabindra Nath's newly composed national song *Jana Gana Mana Adhinayaka* was sung publicly for the first time at this session. This song is now the recognised National Anthem in Free India. The Congress naturally thanked the British Government for their good sense in annulling the much-hated partition of Bengal.

The Bengal Provincial Conference was held at Dacca in March 1912 under the presidentship of Aswini Kumar Dutt of Barisal. The part played by him and his associates in the district of Buckergunge will be written in letters of gold if the history of the freedom movement in Bengal will ever see the light of day. He was one of the nine Bengal leaders kept in detention without trial outside Bengal for fourteen long months. The Bengal Provincial Conference was the meeting ground of the Bengali politicians irrespective of their political colour. Both leaders and delegates mustered strong in this session with an attitude of triumph for the recent happening. But Aswini Kumar Dutt struck in his address a note of warning not to be led away by this apparent success. We must stick to and rigidly follow the country's programme of the Swadeshi movement. "Nations by themselves are made"—was the keynote of his presidential speech.

A dark cloud was seen in the international horizon. Moslems were disillusioned at home and abroad. Leaders of the Moslem League got its creed changed so as to tally with the objective of the Congress. The World War 1 broke out in August 1914. The British Government needed India's help in men and material. It promised reforms. But the Bengal revolutionaries could not rely on the British promise. They had spread their organisation all over India. They

could not miss this opportunity. Their actions, here and there, unnerved the Britishers. While proposing reforms immediately after the war, the British fell upon the old tactics of repression and oppression. Equipped with emergency acts, they imprisoned some of our trusted leaders, both Hindus and Mussalmans, and kept them in detention in unknown places without trial, while tribunals were instituted for summary trial of the revolutionaries. Prisoners in the Andamans suffered severely from the cruel and inhuman treatment by the government officials of the place. We were mere boys at the time of the first World War but can testify from our own experience that even uneducated village folk wished in their heart of hearts for the victory of the enemy—the Germans. The rulers had lost the confidence of the ruled.

Bengal leaders, while ready to help the British in their distress, became restive for their Black and Tan methods. The Indian Association was so broad-based as to include both the Moderates and the Extremists. They sat together on the executive and carried on national work with utmost unity. The Association instituted committees to enquire into the complaints and grievances of the prisoners here and in the Andamans. They helped the under-trial prisoners with defence counsel and money. Pecuniary help was rendered to the families in distress due to the governmental vagaries. Unity of the Bengal politicians for national service might have been an eye-opener to the leaders of the Congress. Annie Besant of hallowed memory came forward to unite the different political groups and parties on the Congress platform. She succeeded. At the Lucknow session of the Congress in 1916, the Moderates and Extremists met together after nine years of separation. Lokamanya Balgangadhar Tilak, who had served his full term of six years' imprisonment, received universal ovation in the Congress. This session was presided over by Ambika Charan Majumdar of Faridpur. He had served as President of the Indian Association with considerable success. His utterances on the virtue



of national unity were based on his personal experiences gained in that capacity.

The Home Rule League sponsored by Annie Besant got whole-hearted support from Tilak of Bombay and the progressive politicians of Bengal and other provinces. They started a determined campaign throughout the country. The Government could not view the movement with complacency. They went so far as to incarcerate Besant and her associates, and Tilak and Pal were refused entrance into the Punjab which had already turned into a problem province. The attitude of the Moderates towards the Home Rule Movement was somewhat critical from the very outset. While the movement grew in volume, they stood apart; but Chitta Ranjan Das (later 'Deshabandhu') presided over the 1917 session of the Bengal Provincial Conference, and while discussing local matters, welcomed the movement in Bengal and urged his countrymen to work for its success. The Congress session of 1917 was scheduled in Calcutta. This time again troubles flared up in the Reception Committee over the election of the President. Resignation of Rabindra Nath Tagore, Chairman of the Reception Committee, paved the way for compromise between the Moderates and Extremists. Annie Besant was elected President for the session, and Rai Bahadur Baikuntha Nath Sen Chairman of the Reception Committee. This patched-up compromise between the two schools of thought could not last even for a year.

Towards the close of World War 1, a scheme of reforms was sponsored by Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State for India, and the Viceroy Lord Chelmsford. The scheme is popularly known as Montford Reforms proposal. This served as a veritable apple of discord. Politicians of the advanced school, now known as Nationalists, like Bipin Chandra Pal welcomed the scheme as it contained the seeds of *responsible* government. The difference between the two groups, Moderates and Extremists, lay more in attitude and temperament than in substance. The Moderates, now known as

Liberals aspired after the establishment of self-government on the colonial lines by *stages*, while the Nationalists wanted immediate establishment of the same. The breach was complete at the special session of the Indian National Congress held at Bombay in 1918. Those interested in the Indian politics of the day would do well to consult the diary of Edwin Montagu during his tour in India at this time. He described candidly how the moderate section of the Indian politicians formed themselves into a liberal party on his advice during his stay in Calcutta. An Indian delegation, representing the Congress, the Home Rule League, the Liberal Party, to name only a few, went to England, on invitation to place their considered views on the proposed scheme. On the basis of the Montford scheme, and comments and criticisms on it, the Indian Reforms Bill was drafted and passed by both Houses of the British Parliament. The Bill emerged as the Indian Reforms Act of 1919.

Early this year India was greatly disturbed by the machination of the local bureaucracy. The ill-famed Rowlatt Bill was on the legislative anvil. The purport of this legislation was to empower the Government to arrest any and every person on suspicion and keep him in detention for an unlimited period. The war was over. Countries would settle down in peace and tranquility. But our land was so unfortunate as to be the victim of such an arbitrary legislation. In the face of countrywide opposition the legislation, known in history as the Rowlatt Act, was passed. Mahatma Gandhi did not allow the nation to rot in frustration. He started *Satyagraha* against this lawless law. The response was immediate. The Punjab had suffered severely at the hands of the bureaucracy during the war. The Punjabis rose as one man against this bill and supported the *Satyagraha* movement whole-heartedly. The Jalianwalla Bag massacre at Amritsar which followed is now a matter of history. It has been proved beyond doubt that, bent on suppressing this sudden outbreak of national feeling, the local government instigated the military to teach the

people a good lesson; and the result was firing on the unarmed people and killing more than a thousand in consequence of indiscriminate firing. The country was again in a turmoil.

With these sad and tragic memories the Indian National Congress met at Amritsar in December 1919, with Pandit Motilal Nehru as President. The people had still some confidence in the British Government. The Congress passed resolutions urging the recall and impeachment of Sir Michael O'Dwyer and punishment of General Dyer. The stalwarts of the Nationalist Party, Balgangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Bipin Chandra Pal, Chitta Ranjan Das, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya—all were present and took active part in the discussion and deliberation of the all-important forthcoming Reforms. They, however, resolved upon accepting the Reforms for what they were worth. Prisoners held in detention under the Indian Defence Act were gradually released, and just after this release Maulana Shaukat Ali and Mohammad Ali came to the Congress to register their assent to the Congress policy. The year 1920 saw the launching of the mighty Non-cooperation Movement by Mahatma Gandhi. The Special Congress in Calcutta and its annual session at Nagpur examined the Non-cooperation proposal critically and approved of the programme by a vast majority. The country then plunged into a grim struggle which continued<sup>1</sup> for thirty years and resulted in the freedom of India.

## 15

### THE GENESIS OF EXTREMISM

*Ramesh Chandra Majumdar*

The Indian National Congress, founded in 1885, played a very important role in the political evolution of modern India. It developed into a powerful political organisation of an all-India character which offered a common platform to politically minded English-educated Indians, gave their political ideas a definite shape and form, and came to be recognised by the people as well as the Government as the mouthpiece of the ardent advocates for political reform in India as an integral part of the British Empire. But without minimising its importance in any way, it may be said, without much exaggeration, that the political ideal and the practical measures of reform advocated by the Indian National Congress between 1885 and 1905 represent more or less the same stages of political evolution which were witnessed in Bengal before the foundation of the Congress. The shortcomings of the British rule, catalogue of grievances of the people, and the various measures suggested for their removal cover more or less the same ground. The attitude displayed by the old and eminent political leaders in Bengal is also faithfully reflected in the Congress. We mark the same unflinching faith in the providential character of the British rule in India, equally robust and sincere sentiment of loyalty and devotion to the British Crown, and the same pathetic, almost abject, belief in the sense of justice of the British people, who need only be convinced of the justice

of our case for redressing all our wrongs and conceding all our reasonable demands.

While the Indian National Congress was thus faithfully following the beaten track, a new wave of nationalism had passed over Bengal, and from Bengal to other parts of India. But up to 1905, the Congress did not, in any marked way, reflect the new nationalist spirit or the advanced political ideas and sentiments which it brought in its train. As this was the real cause of the birth of extremism in Indian politics, it is necessary to refer, in very broad outline, to the growth and development of the new spirit of nationalism in Bengal.

The first clarion call was sounded by Rajnarayan Basu in 1861 when he issued a prospectus for the establishment of a Society for the Promotion of National Feeling among the Educated Natives of Bengal. It was a heroic attempt to turn the thoughts of the anglicised English-educated Bengalis towards their own culture and customs. Those who had hitherto thought in English, talked in English, and even dreamed in English, were now asked to speak and write in Bengali, to wear *dhoti* and *chadar* instead of hats and coats, to give up the habit of taking European food and frequent European hotels, to adopt indigenous games and physical exercises, to promote the Hindu system of medicine, etc. etc. To a generation which was the ardent advocate of European or Christian ethics and rationalism, Rajnarayan Basu, himself a prominent product of the English education, boldly proclaimed the superiority of Hindu religion and culture over European and Christian theology and civilisation.

The most significant trait of this nationalism was an intense love of the motherland, based on a conception of its past greatness and future potentialities. Bankimchandra Chatterji, its next high-priest, distinguished this patriotism from its Western prototype by raising it to a religious level. He preached it in the *Anandamath* (1882), his famous

novel, based on the story of a band of self-less *sannyasins*, who called themselves *santanans* (children) and regarded the motherland as the mother-goddess Durga, the source of all power and energy. With them devotion to the motherland took the place of religion, and self-less service for restoring her from her present degenerate condition to former glory was the only form of worship to the deity. Thus did Bankim-chandra convert patriotism into religion and religion into patriotism.

Patriotism was also lifted to a high spiritual level by Swami Vivekananda. His Neo-Vedantism sought to release the spiritual ideals of the race not merely, or even mainly, by knowledge and meditation, but by the spiritualisation of the concrete contents and actual relations of life. He therefore strongly urged for the social, economic, and political reconstruction which will be helpful to the development of the highest spiritual life of every individual member of the community. This great *sannyasin*, the disciple of Ramakrishna, preached in unequivocal language that what India needed was not so much religion or philosophy, of which she had enough, but food for her hungry millions, social justice for the lower classes, strength and energy for her emasculated people, and a sense of pride and prestige as a great nation of the world which was destined, as soon as she got rid of her present state of slavery and abject poverty, to bring salvation to the world by preaching the great humanitarian philosophy of Vedanta; for it not only preached unity and brotherhood of man, but placed it on the solid basis of a great philosophical doctrine, the unity of man and God. His trumpet call to all Indians to shed fear and stand forth as men by imbibing *śakti* (energy and strength) galvanised the current of national life, infused new hopes and aspirations, and placed the service to the country on a high spiritual level. Indirectly, the considerable extent to which the life and precepts of Vivekananda and his *guru* Shri Ramakrishna raised the prestige of Hinduism in Europe and America quickened the sense of national pride and sentiment of patriotism among the Indians.

Neither Bankimchandra nor Vivekananda was an active politician, but the spirit which they created had a great repercussion on Indian politics. A great sense of frustration had already possessed the minds of the people on account of the failure of the Indian National Congress to achieve any substantial result. The pious resolutions they passed in their annual meetings from year to year fell on deaf ears, and the British Government was in no mood to take any serious notice of the angry verbal protests of a 'microscopic minority'. Moreover, the Congress failed to respond in any way to the new nationalist spirit. An abstract love of liberty for its own sake and a claim upon it as our birth-right, a passionate desire for freedom based upon a sense of our own ancient culture and civilisation, an innate hatred of British rule on account of its iniquitous character and racial arrogance of the Englishmen which resulted in brutal assaults upon inoffensive Indians not unoften causing the rupture of their spleens,—all these and other things of the same type which deeply stirred the minds of the nationalists were conspicuous by their absence in the programme and proceedings of the Indian National Congress during the first twenty years of its existence. It could not keep pace with the advanced political ideals and failed to respond to the higher calls of nationality and patriotism. The inevitable result was that the outmoded ideals and methodology of the Congress failed to satisfy a rapidly growing section of advanced political thinkers, who had imbibed the new spirit of nationalism, had a new vision of India's future, and a new method of approach to realise it.

It was a son of Bengal who first entered an emphatic protest against the Indian National Congress. Arabinda Ghosh, destined to attain immortal fame, but as yet unknown in political life, planned to write a series of articles under the title *New lamps for old* in the *Indu Prakash* of Bombay, as early as 1894, in order to voice the new sentiment. The following extract from one of them would serve as a good specimen:

The Congress in Bengal is dying of consumption; annually its proportions sink into greater insignificance, its leaders, the Bonnerjis and Banerjis and Lalmohan Ghoshes, have climbed into the rarefied atmosphere of the legislative Council and lost all hold on the imagination of the young men. The desire for a nobler and more inspiring patriotism is growing more intense.

The new chord struck by Arabinda caused alarm in the Congress camp and he was not allowed to continue his series of articles in the same strain. Pressure was brought upon the editor of the *Indu Prakash* by Ranade and other Congress leaders and the paper refused to publish his articles.

The views about the Congress held by the followers of the new creed were very lucidly expressed by Lala Lajpat Rai in a very able and comprehensive review of the shortcomings of the Congress in which he discussed at length the reasons for the failure of the Congress to achieve any conspicuous success. These may be summed up in one sentence, namely, that the Congress lacked the essentials of a national movement. Instead of believing that all vital progress must spring from within, the Congress looked to the English for all improvements. The Congress movement was neither inspired by the people nor devised or planned by them. It was a movement not from within. No section of the people identified themselves with it to such an extent that they would willingly undergo any sufferings or sacrifice. The leaders were not in touch with the people. Perhaps they did not even want to come in touch with them. Their propaganda was confined to a few English-educated persons, carried on in English, and was meant for the ears of the authorities rather than of the people. The leaders always felt shy of the masses, made no efforts to reach them, and systematically discouraged the younger men from doing the same. Some of them even openly opposed efforts in this direction. The Congress leaders had neither sufficient political consciousness nor faith. They had certain political opinions, but



not beliefs for which they were willing to suffer. Nor were they prepared to bear persecution for the cause they undertook. Either they did not know that they had a cause, or they were wanting in that earnestness which makes man suffer for a cause.

It is not relevant to our present purpose to inquire into the allegations made by Lajpat Rai in the above trenchant criticism. But it lays bare the fundamental differences between the two schools of political thought. No wonder, therefore, that ere long the cleavage between the old and the new schools was so much widened that a small dissident group was formed within the fold of the Congress. Disputes and discussions between the two, which may still be read in the pages of the contemporary journals, left no doubt that two distinct, almost irreconcilable, groups divided the Congress organisation. These two wings were popularly, though not very correctly, styled as Moderates and Extremists. The people could easily realise that a new political movement of great potentialities was forging ahead.

It is always difficult to single out one individual, however great, as the creator of a great movement. But if there is one person who may be credited with a major contribution in launching the new school of Indian politics, the name of Balgangadhar Tilak immediately comes to one's mind. In his life and activities we may clearly trace the four chief characteristic features which mark this new movement. The first is a sincere love and devotion for the past culture of the country, and the belief that all future development must be based upon this stable foundation. The second is an emphatic assertion that the policy of mendicancy followed by the Congress would not lead to our goal and that it is necessary to assert our rights even at the cost of great sacrifices, before we can hope to achieve any substantial measure of self-government. Thirdly it was Tilak who, for the first time among the political leaders, set out before us in a clear manner the attainment of self-government or Swaraj as our

ideal rather than reforms in administration to which the Congress had devoted its energy and attention. Lastly, it was also Tilak who carried the gospel of self-help and political agitation to the masses. When a terrible famine broke out in Bombay in 1896, Tilak acquainted the peasants with their rights under the Relief Code and asked them not to be cowards and not to pay the Government dues at the cost of their lives and property. He condemned food-riots, but told the hungry people: "Why loot the *bazars*? Go and tell the Collector to give you work and food. That is his duty". This activity of Tilak was described in official circles as the no-rent campaign. Urged by the same idea Tilak organized the Ganapati and Shivaji festivals on a popular basis in order to awaken the mass consciousness, the importance of which the Congress had hitherto failed to realise. In one of the Shivaji festivals the murder of Afzal Khan by Shivaji was defended on the ground of the inner patriotic motive, and a number of verses were put into the mouth of Shivaji to the following effect:

I delivered my country by establishing swaraj and saving religion....Alas, alas, all I see now is the ruin of my country....Foreigners are dragging out Lakshmi by the hands of persecution....Have all our leaders become like helpless figures on the chess-board?

Within ten days of the festival two English officials, Rand and Ayerst, were murdered by the Chapekar brothers. Tilak was prosecuted for his seditious speeches and sentenced to eighteen months' rigorous imprisonment. The result has been thus described: "A wave of discontent and indignation passed over the whole country. Even the untutored mill-hands fasted in protest and students in the colleges and schools wore black mark, indicative of the deep sorrow they felt in their hearts". At the next session of the Congress at Amraoti (1897) the proposal to pass a special resolution about Tilak was thwarted by the influence of the elder group

of politicians, but when Surendranath Banerji was speaking about Tilak, people in the Congress rose to their feet in reverence, triumphantly cried out, echoed and re-echoed the name of Tilak, and began to clap their hands so vigorously that even Surendranath could not make himself heard. The newspapers described the scene in the Congress as unprecedented in its history.

Tilak was sent to prison no less than three times, and offers one of the earliest instances of a political leader suffering such incarceration for political activities. By his speeches and writings, and more, probably, by his life and character, Tilak brought the ideals of new nationalism into the actual field of practical politics. He typified in his person the spirit of the new school of politics, and those who had eyes to see could not fail to realise that the new nationalist movement—the so-called extremism—was gathering tremendous force and was ultimately destined to sweep the whole country. It has been rightly observed that Tilak brought political philosophy in India from heaven to earth, from the Council Hall or the Congress *mandap* to the street and the market. That was the key-note of the new school of thought which, under another able leader, led India to the promised land which Tilak was not vouchsafed to reach.

Tilak's efforts were ably seconded by a number of other leaders, among whom prominent mention should be made of Bipinchandra Pal and Arabinda Ghose in Bengal and Lajpat Rai in the Punjab. They ably carried on the work in the true spirit in their respective areas. But Arabinda was not a mere political leader in the ordinary sense of the term. While Tilak popularised politics and gave it a force and vitality it had hitherto lacked, Arabinda spiritualised it and became the high-priest of nationalism as a religious creed. He revived the theoretical teachings of Bankimchandra and Vivekananda, and introduced them in the field of practical politics. "Nationalism", he said, "is not a mere political programme". "Nationalism is a religion that has come from

God". His life and letters leave no doubt that he actually lived up to this idea. He regarded patriotism as a form of devotion and expressly said that "to the new generations, the redemption of their motherland should be regarded as the true religion, the only means of salvation". How this idea permeated the leaders of the new school may be judged from the following extract from an article by Lajpat Rai:

In my opinion, the problem before us is in the main a religious problem—religious not in the sense of doctrines and dogmas—but religious in so far as to evoke the highest devotion and the greatest sacrifice from us.

Nothing illustrates more forcibly the difference between the two schools of thought than their respective attitude towards the goal of our political struggle. The Moderates wanted reforms in administration under the aegis of the British rule, while the Nationalists held that "good government is no substitute for self-government". The policy of the former was based upon an honest and sincere conviction that the Indians were not yet fit for Swaraj. Stress was laid by them upon our social evils, religious superstitions, communal jealousy, lack of military knowledge, and poverty as factors disqualifying us for Swaraj. Sankaran Nair, the President of the Congress in 1897, the very year in which Tilak was convicted of sedition, gave in his address a vivid description of the anarchy, war, and rapine which would inevitably follow any decline in British supremacy in India. The Nationalists summarily dismissed all these considerations. Tilak summed up the position in one sentence: "Home-rule is my birth-right and I will have it". Bipinchandra Pal further elucidated the idea in the following passage, among others:

The new spirit accepts no other teacher in the art of self-government except self-government itself. It values freedom for its own sake, and desires autonomy, immediate and unconditioned, regard-

less of any considerations of fitness or unfitness of the people for it; because it does not believe serfdom in any shape or form to be a school for real freedom in any country and under any conditions whatever. It holds that the struggle for freedom itself is the highest tutor of freedom which, if it can once possess the mind of a people, shapes itself the life, the character, and the social and civic institutions of the people, to its own proper ends.

As in the case of the end, so in the case of the means to attain it, the difference between the two schools was of a fundamental character. The Congress Liberalism was a product of intellectual conviction. It proceeded very cautiously, calculating each step in advance, balancing loss and gain, and was obsessed by earthly considerations, pure and simple. The approach of the new Nationalism was based on the teachings of Vivekananda which asked every Indian to realise God in the nation, in his fellow-countrymen and demanded unlimited courage and unlimited sacrifice. Arabin-da, as his true disciple, declared his politics to be a religion. "It is a religion", said he, "by which we are trying to realise Him in the three hundred millions of our people". This high spiritual ideal determined his bold method of approach, which is pithily, but very beautifully, put in a letter to his wife: "If a demon sits on the breasts of my mother and is about to drink her blood, shall I sit idle and coldly calculate whether I have the strength enough to fight it? My only duty is to rush to the rescue of my mother." Referring to the terrible repression let loose upon the people by the Government, he said in a speech: "Storm has swept over us today. I saw it come.... And I said in my heart, It is God who rides abroad on the wings of the hurricane.... Repression is nothing but the hammer of God.... without suffering there can be no growth. They do not know that great as he is, Aswinikumar Dutt is not the leader of this movement, that Tilak is not the leader,—God is the leader".

Arabinda raised politics to a higher spiritual plane, but he did more than this. Tilak had raised his voice against the policy of mendicancy followed by the Congress, but it was reserved for Arabinda to hit upon a positive approach to the problem. He anticipated Mahatma Gandhi by preaching the cult of passive resistance and non-cooperation as far back as 1906. A draft resolution on the subject was issued in the very first issue of the *Bande Mataram*, edited by him. It clearly enunciated the following objectives with suitable preambles:

- (1) By an organised and relentless boycott of British goods we propose to render the further exploitation of the country impossible.
- (2) By an organised judicial boycott we propose to make the bureaucratic administration impossible.
- (3) We refuse to send our boys to Government schools, or schools aided and controlled by Government.
- (4) We refuse to go to the Executive for help or advice or protection.

The doctrine of Passive Resistance, as Arabinda called it, is further explained by the following passage in one of his speeches: "Our methods are those of self-help and passive resistance. The policy of passive resistance was evolved partly as the necessary complement of self-help, partly as a means of putting pressure on Government. The essence of this policy is the refusal of co-operation so long as we are not admitted to a substantial share and an effective control in legislation, finance and administration. Just as 'no representation, no taxation' was the watchword of American constitutional agitation in the eighteenth century, so 'no control, no co-operation' should be the watchword of our lawful agitation—for constitution we have none—, in the twentieth. We sum up this refusal of co-operation in the convenient word 'boycott', refusal of co-operation in the industrial exploitation

of our country, in education, in government, in judicial administration, in the details of official intercourse”.

It would thus be seen that the New School of Politics known as the Extremist laid down clearly the goal of our political struggle and the methods to achieve it which proved triumphant forty years later. It will hardly be an exaggeration to say that India till the last followed the ideals and methods which marked the genesis of new nationalism represented by the so-called Extremist School of politics.

The term ‘Extremist’, applied to the political party whose aims and activities have been described above, is a misnomer, for it does not represent the extremest advance of the new nationalist forces which brought it into existence. It is a well-known fact that those who launch a revolutionary plan often find themselves unable to regulate or even control its pace and set a limit to its goal. A revolutionary urge gathers momentum and creates new channels for its expression. This happened also in India and gave rise to the so-called terrorism which will be described in Chapter 17. It is only necessary here to say a few words about its genesis.

There is hardly any doubt that this movement owes its origin to the same currents of nationalism which produced the new school of political thought noticed above. As a matter of fact the proper name for it is militant nationalism rather than terrorism, which imperfectly describes its aims and methods. History of all subject nations struggling for freedom shows that bands of young men, goaded by a spirit of frustration at the failure of all legitimate means to achieve their goal, or honestly convinced of their futility in advance, are lured by the prospect of gaining their end by armed resistance, and, where it is not practicable to resort to it openly, naturally favour underground movement of secret organisations. The same thing happened in India.

There are stray references to the formation of secret societies in Bengal and Bihar in the latter half of the last

century. Bipinchandra Pal tells us in his autobiography that Surendranath Banerji's lecture on Mazzini led to the formation of many secret societies on the model of the Carbonari organisation in Italy with which Mazzini was associated at the beginning of his patriotic career. We are told that "Calcutta student community was at that time almost honeycombed with these organisations", and what is more interesting, still, "Surendranath was himself, I think, the President of quite a number of these secret societies". Though every member of these societies, or at least some of them, signed the pledge of membership with his own blood drawn at the point of a sword from his breast, these were amateurish organisations and languished in no time. The whole thing may be regarded as a passing episode in the latter seventies of the last century.

But far more serious was the secret organisation of Vasudeo Balwant Phadke in Maharashtra about the same time. He actually gathered round him a band of Ramoshis and Dahangars to wage war against the British Government, and committed dacoities to collect funds for the purpose. He was arrested and sentenced to transportation for life in 1880, and died in prison at Aden in 1883. We hear next of a secret organisation by two brothers, named Damodar Chapekar and Balkrishna Chapekar, who murdered two English officials (1897) as mentioned above, and paid the extreme penalty of law. The organisation, however, survived the founders and, among other things, avenged their death by murdering in 1899 the two informers who had helped the Government.

A secret society was also started in Western India before the end of the nineteenth century.

The next phase of the secret revolutionary movement in India was developed in Bengal, mainly by the effort of Shri Arabinda. He was familiar with the idea of revolutionary activity even during his residence in England. While he was at Baroda he set himself to the task of organising a revolution-



ary party in Bengal. He probably got the inspiration from his maternal grandfather, Rajnarayan Basu, to whom reference has been made above. For Arabinda tells us that the latter once formed a secret society of which Tagore, then a very young man, was a member. In 1902 Arabinda sent Jatindranath Bandyopadhyay to Calcutta for organising revolutionary activity in Bengal. He formed a revolutionary society in Calcutta which rapidly grew in importance, and led to the formation of similar societies. Arabinda, who himself came to Bengal, says that he found there some very small secret societies, recently started, and acting separately without any clear direction. Arabinda tried to unite them with a common programme, but did not succeed to any appreciable extent. The Anusilan Samiti was the oldest and the leading organisation in Bengal. Inspired by the teachings of Vivekananda and encouraged by Swami Saradananda and Sister Nivedita, its activities were originally confined to the propaganda for the use of swadeshi (indigenous) goods, Indian gymnastics, *lathi* play, sanitary work in the *bustee* etc. P. Mitra, a barrister in Calcutta, came to be associated with it and through his efforts it was amalgamated with the society organised by Jatindranath Bandyopadhyay and Barindrakumar Ghosh, younger brother of Arabinda, who had also come from Baroda and joined Jatindranath. The officers of the combined society were the following: President—Pramatha Mitra; Vice-Presidents—Chittaranjan Das (C. R. Das) and Arabinda; Treasurer—Surendranath Tagore. The subsequent history of the Anusilan Samiti and the real growth of the underground movement from this humble beginning are associated with, and mainly the product of, the Swadeshi movement.

It is not necessary to discuss here the moral propriety or the expediency and efficacy of the so-called terrorist movement. But howsoever opinions might differ on these points, one must recognise that, apart from the general forces working for nationalism, the movement was specially or more directly inspired by the teachings of Bankimchandra, Vivekananda and Arabinda, who placed the country on the altar of God

and asked for sufferings and self-immolation as the best offerings for His worship. That these teachings, to which a pointed reference has been made above, inspired the lives of many a martyr who hailed the scaffold with a smile on their lips or suffered torments worse than death without the least flinching, is proved by their own confessions. It is not for us to discuss whether it is a manifestation of proverbial Bengali sentimentality, pure and simple, or deserves to be regarded as something higher and nobler reaching the level of religious frenzy. But in any case, its later degeneration cannot take away its pristine glory.

In conclusion it is necessary to point out that, although the new spirit of nationalism was the main driving force, the emergence of Extremism was also partly influenced by contemporary events in the world outside India. The discomfiture of Italy in the Abyssinian War in 1896, the rise of Japan as a great power in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the defeat she inflicted in 1904-05 upon Russia, one of the great military Powers of Europe, had a great repercussion upon the Indians. The early discomfitures of the British in the Boer War had still more significance. A minor people, almost negligible from the military point of view, successfully defying the authority of mighty Britain served as an object lesson to the Indians, and encouraged the idea that they could also rely on their own strength.

But it was the Irish struggle for independence against the British which served as the great inspiration to the Indians. It is not often realised that the struggle for freedom in Ireland offers a very close parallel to that in India, and both the countries passed through the same stages before they achieved their goal, partially in both cases, Ulster being a counterpart of Pakistan. The constitutional agitation led by the Irish members of the British Parliament, the doctrine of passive resistance borrowed from Hungary and adopted as a political programme by Arthur Griffith in 1900, the further development of it by the organisation known as

Sinn Fein founded in 1905, and the underground movement during the first quarter of the nineteenth century preceded by isolated acts of terrorism in the eighteenth,—all have their exact counterparts in India. It is natural to imagine that two such closely parallel movements, both directed against the English and reaching their climax in the first quarter of the present century, were influenced by each other. There is some evidence to show that there was a close contact between the nationalist and revolutionary movements in India and Ireland. The meeting between De Valera and Subhaschandra Bose was not perhaps a mere accident or a passing episode, but the culmination of a close intimacy between Extremism in India and Ireland extending over a long period. Both the Irish and the Indians, particularly the section known as the 'terrorists', were also profoundly influenced by the 'nihilism' in Russia.

Nearer home, the example of China under the leadership of Sun Yat-sen was also probably not lost upon the Indian nationalists, though here, again, the influence was probably reciprocal.

## 16

### EVOLUTION OF SWADESHI THOUGHT

*Soumyendra Nath Tagore*

England came to India as the instrument of history to unleash the forces of the bourgeois revolution in India. Unification of the country under one all-India government and the introduction of machinery in production were the two indispensable pre-requisites of bourgeois revolution which Britain had to accomplish in India in her own interest. The by-product was the birth of the Indian middle class and the germination of Indian nationalism. Dame History often plays such tricks; often the by-product of her actions turn out to be not less important and significant than the desired objectives.

In India there were only two persons, in the closing years of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century, who had grasped the historical significance of this economic revolution that came in the wake of British rule in India. They were Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833) and Dwarkanath Tagore (1794-1846). Both were lovers of India, proud of their national heritage, nationalists, yet they wore no blinkers to obstruct their vision from observing forces working in India and in the world outside. They were the only two men in India at that time who had a truly developed historical sense to understand the true significance of the economic and political forces let loose in India by British occupation. Both welcomed the economic revolution, and fully realised that

the political changes that must follow in order to prepare the ground for the fullest inter-play of the economic forces would be of immense benefit to India. Yet, keen and anxious as they were to see that the stagnant waters of Indian economy received the tide of industrial revolution, they were fully aware of the political and economic handicap that Indians would suffer under an alien government. Both Rammohan and Dwarkanath worked hard to remove these handicaps so that Indians would get their legitimate place in the administrative machinery of the government.

Rammohan, who was the fountain-head of the Renaissance movement in India, agitated for various economic reforms. In his evidence before the Parliament in 1832 on the condition of the *ryots* in India, he severely criticised the Zamindars for their tyranny over the peasantry, and took the Paramount Power to task for giving a free hand to the Zamindars to exploit and tyrannise over the peasantry. Rammohan agitated against the extortion of *tola* from traders in the *hats* by the Zamindars, demanded the imposition of tax on luxury goods, and worked for the abolition of monopolistic control of salt trade by the East India Company. In England a great fight was going on between the protagonists of monopoly and free trade. Rammohan as well as Dwarkanath were out and out supporters of free trade. Both of them had clearly understood that monopoly offered a hindrance to the development and progress of the industrial revolution.

In the sphere of administration of the country, Rammohan demanded the appointment of Indians as assessors in the judicial department, the appointment of Indian judges and the appointment of Indians as jurors. He had made the further suggestion that the village *panchayets* be invested with the power and function of the jury. Both Rammohan and Dwarkanath fought valiantly for the freedom of the Press and both realised fully the importance of the Press in the struggle for social, economic and political reform and

founded a number of English, Hindi, Persian and Bengali weeklies and dailies for propagating their ideas on social, political and economic reform.

In 1837 when the Government appointed a Committee for the reform of the mofussil police, Dwarkanath Tagore suggested in his evidence before the Committee the creation of the post of Deputy Magistrate. These Deputy Magistrates according to Dwarkanath "should be taken from the respectable class of people and not selected merely to increase the salary of those who are at present employed, whether Darogahs, Seristadars, or others, amongst whom a good man here and there be found, but generally speaking they are good for nothing.... They should be stationed in the interior, and their powers in criminal cases should correspond with those of Moonsiffs, and they should be allowed to exercise jurisdiction over the Thanadars".

In April 1838, Dwarkanath established the Landholders' Association which, as is evident from its very name, was the organisation of the landholders. The middle class as yet had not come to its political manhood, and the landholders who constituted the most influential social class at that time established this Association for the furtherance of their own interest. The Landholders' Association soon grew into a powerful political organisation. This organisation did not naturally find favour with the rising middle class and efforts were soon made by this class to have a political platform of its own. But here also Dwarkanath Tagore, the leader of the Landholders' Association, played a significant role.

In January 1842, Dwarkanath left India for Europe. While in England Dwarkanath visited the principal institutions of England and was greatly attracted by the democratic set-up of the Government and the social and political institutions of England. When he returned to India at the end of 1842, Dwarkanath was accompanied by George Thompson, a member of Parliament, a great orator and a politician reputed for his liberal views.

On 20 April 1843, under the chairmanship of George Thompson, a public meeting was held in which a resolution was moved for the establishment of the Bengal British India Society. The resolution was moved by Tarachand Chakravarty, a follower of Derozio and a disciple of Ram-mohan Roy, and the most prominent leader of the Young Bengal group; it was seconded by Chandrasekhar Deb, another prominent leader of Young Bengal. The resolution ran as follows: "That a Society be now formed and denominated the Bengal British India Society, the object of which shall be the collection and dissemination of information, relating to the actual condition of the people of British India, and the laws and institutions, and resources of the country, and to employ such other means of a peaceable and lawful character as may appear calculated to secure the welfare, extend the just rights, and advance the interests of all classes of our fellow-subjects".

Thus, with the help and guidance of George Thompson, the friend of Dwarkanath Tagore, the leaders of the Young Bengal group brought into being the Bengal British India Society, the first organisation established in India for the advancement of social, economic and political interest of the rising middle class of India. The Bengal British India Society agitated for the spread of education amongst the people, and a memorial was sent to the East India Company demanding Indianisation of services. Condemning the monopolistic utilisation of the Civil Service by the Britishers, Tarachand Chakravarty wrote: "It represses the expansion of talent and genius among the different classes of the people and prevents industry, merit and character from being duly remunerated....Open it to public competition, and the result will be more salutary and advantageous in every point of view."

The resolution for the Indianisation of services, which was moved in the public meeting held on 18 April 1843

convened by the Bengal British India Society, was moved by Debendranath Tagore. Before long the Society ceased to exist and in 1851 the British Indian Association was established with the object "to promote the improvement and efficiency of the British Indian Government by every legitimate means in its powers and thereby to advance the common interests of Great Britain and India and ameliorate the conditions of the native inhabitants".

Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905) was elected its Secretary. In one of the meetings convened on behalf of the British Indian Association, Debendranath Tagore demanded revision of the Chowkidari system and said: "The rural population, whose industry most largely contributes to the resources of the State, were left not only without adequate protection, but without many of the advantages which are enjoyed by other classes. The means devised in the draft of an Act for affording protection to them, contemplated a control over the watchman employed by the villagers at their own expense, but involved no outlay from the public resources. But as it happened that a considerable portion of the revenue was raised with avowed object of providing a sufficient Police force for the country, the Committee were bound to bring to the notice of the Government the wrong which would be done; were the proposed measure to be carried into effect, and the obligation which had long been incurred but not fulfilled, of providing a sufficient force for the protection of the people". The memorial which was submitted by Debendranath Tagore on behalf of the Association as a protest against the existing tax on Salt which oppressed the peasantry said *inter alia*: "Half a dozen persons may be joint-proprietors of a small talook or a parcel of rent-free land, having a dozen or half a dozen Ryots, hardly yielding a gross profit of Rs. 100 a year, or being of a value exceeding five hundred rupees, and each of them may be fined in the aggregate market-value of his property, if any of the Ryots be too poor to pay in any week for his daily salt, and in order to avoid the difficulty be foolish enough to boil a little of the



saline earth or dig a few holes near the seashore and steep straw therein to burn, for its ashes or collect together a heap of earth”.

Politics had by now left its purely feudal mooring and had started dealing with the problems of the common man.

Another memorial demanding self-government and demanding that the majority of the members of the Governor-General's Council be Indian was submitted to the Government.

Branches of the British Indian Association were established in Bombay, Madras and other parts of India. This was the first attempt made to build up an all-India organisation for voicing the social, political and economic demands of the people of India. Debendranath, like his father Dwarkanath, realised the great importance of the Press in building up the national movement.

In 1861 a fortnightly paper, the *Indian Mirror*, was started with the financial assistance of Debendranath Tagore. Nabagopal Mitra started the *National Paper*. Debendranath Tagore supplied both inspiration and the financial assistance.

In 1867 the Hindu Mela was started. Debendranath was the inspirer and founder of this institution. Ganendranath Tagore was its Secretary, and Nabagopal Mitra its Assistant Secretary. Swadeshi, encouragement to the manufacture of indigenous products and their use, development of our own language and physical culture were its declared objectives. The nationalist movement had already in 1867 accepted as its main planks—the manufacture and use of indigenous products (Swadeshi), encouragement to the growth and use of national language, and the development of the physique of the nation's manhood for a persistent struggle against foreign domination. Hindu Mela continued for nearly fourteen years.

Till now the constitutional method of agitation was considered the only method to be used for wresting concessions

from the British rulers of India. The political consciousness of the middle class could not possibly skip over the condition of its growth and maturity. As yet it was not confident of its own power and role in the struggle for national emancipation. That was yet to come. In the political condition then prevalent in the country, the political activity of the middle class could not be anything but constitutional pleading and appeal to the alien rulers. It had not yet garnered experience from the political thought and action of its class in Europe. The French Revolution and the history of European Anarchism and Russian Nihilism conveyed no message to the Indian intelligentsia, as in the 19th century, by and large, the members of the intelligentsia were unaware of these developments.

With the advent of Rajnarain Bose (1826-1899), the nationalist movement lost some of its hesitant and supplicant attitude. A note of burning pain for the loss of national freedom and a note of all-out defiance became distinctly audible. Addressing his countrymen Rajnarain Bose wrote in 1888:

Originality in authorship is being smothered under the dead weight of foreign imitation. Even the vernacular conversation of your educated men is a ridiculous jumble of English and vernacular words, ridiculous in the sight of even Englishmen, violating good taste and shocking every true lover of his mother-tongue. Your school-books especially those on the subjects of history and geography are written in such a way as not to excite the least national feelings in the minds of your youth.... Your arts and industries, which won and are still winning the admiration of Europeans, are languishing. Your artisans, the products of whose hands win such admiration are starving for want of employment. The immense material resources as well as the money of your country are being carried away by foreigners while we have to depend on England for even

such a common article as lucifer match, nay, even for the very salt, which season our rice, we being compelled to import it from Liverpool by cruel regulations rendering it punishable on the part of a poor ryot, who lives on the sea-coast to manufacture a small quantity for his own use by boiling the water of the sea that flows by his feet. The soil of India is getting impoverished year after year. Starvation is so much increasing in the country that one of the governing body himself admits that fifty millions of people are living on one meal a day. Will you not remedy this fearful state of things by self-help, persistent constitutional agitation and other lawful means? Will you for ever lie in the slough of despondence?.....Are you so dull-headed as to think that our foreign Conquerors are a set of philanthropists who have come to our country to serve your interests only and not their own? Do you think they will neglect their own Birmingham and Manchester, and encourage your arts and manufactures as you wish? Members of a down-trodden race! Know ye not that he who would rise, must himself make the attempt?

But, what attempts should the members of a down-trodden race make so that they may break the shackles of slavery and rise to freedom and glory? Though Rajnarain Bose talked of "persistent constitutional agitation and other lawful means", he had fully believed in the legitimacy of the use of force against the alien rulers of India, and in the necessity of forming secret societies for that purpose. Rabindranath Tagore has narrated in his *Memoirs* how he and his brother Jyotirindranath Tagore became members of the Secret Society established by Rajnarain Bose where the members had to take oath that they would destroy by the use of force the enemies of the country.

Individual terrorism as a legitimate means of struggle for national freedom was mooted by Rajnarain Bose and

was accepted by the militant section of the Indian nationalists as an ethical principle of struggle. But though the idea had ready reception, it had to wait a few years more to be translated into action by Aurobindo Ghose, Barin Ghosh and Satyen Bose, the first two being the grandsons and the third being the nephew of Rajnarain Bose. The nationalist movement took to the heroic path, though it was the futile path of individual terrorism.

It will be well to bear in mind that those who had brought the nationalist movement into being were men of profound religious conviction as well as of deep learning. Rammohan Roy, Tarachand Chakravarty, Debendranath Tagore, Rajnarain Bose and others, all of them belonged to this category. Pandit Sibnath Sastri, the well-known religious reformer of the Brahmo Samaj, also belonged to this class of men. He too was an ardent crusader of the nationalist movement. Bipinchandra Pal, one of the foremost leaders of the Swadeshi and the nationalist movement of India wrote about Pandit Sibnath Sastri: "Pandit Shasri was the first to initiate us to nationalism and to the mission of dedicating ourselves to the task of winning freedom for India. . . . We had to sign a pledge of which the first clause declared—'We acknowledge self-government as the only god-ordained government.' Physical culture and pooling of individual earnings for the use of all workers of the nationalist cause also formed part of the pledge". The middle-class intelligentsia were fortunate to have men of such deep culture and heroic mould as the leaders of the nationalist movement which was till this time governed by the central ideas of the Renaissance initiated by Rammohan Roy.

Swami Vivekananda however brought a new current in the stream of nationalist thought. Nurtured though he was in the tradition of the renaissance, Vivekananda (1863-1902) differed from it both in religious outlook as well as in the intellectual sphere. As a member of the Brahmo Samaj he had however in his early days imbibed thoroughly the

spirit of militant opposition to social evils, and accepted whole-heartedly the doctrine of social service which he at a later stage of his life incorporated in the ideal of the Ramakrishna Mission. The nationalist movement upto this time had been critical and discriminatory in character. It did not tinge our past with a romantic colour. It accepted and rejected established customs and traditions after critical appraisal. It neither accepted blindly nor rejected blindly. Swami Vivekananda had condemned the caste restrictions in severe terms but he did not proceed to ally himself with those who worked for the abolition of caste. Thus Swami Vivekananda's condemnation of caste remained a verbal condemnation, it did not become a sustained social effort. On the contrary, Swami Vivekananda upheld Hinduism, root and branch, with all the intense fervour of his passionate personality. Acceptance of traditions after critical appraisal, the rationalism of the renaissance got submerged under the irrational tide of revivalism. What the nationalist movement lost in the sphere of thought and judgement, however, it gained in the realm of feeling and emotionalism. Swami Vivekananda was a passionate nationalist. He was suffering agony because of India's thralldom, and was working, if not directly, indirectly with all his heart for strengthening the freedom movement.

Sister Nivedita, the great disciple of Swami Vivekananda, allied herself completely with the nationalist movement, not with the mild wing of the supplicants and petitioners, but with the fiery wing of the votaries of force who took to the path of bomb and revolver. She encouraged them and helped them in their revolutionary activities. The nationalist movement, specially its revolutionary wing, was thus greatly influenced by the Hindu revivalism of Swami Vivekananda. Henceforward the nationalist movement was dominated more by the ideas of Hindu revivalism than by the ideas of 'the composite nationalism' of the renaissance movement. Though the cult of force had been accepted, it had yet to take organisational shape. The revolutionary movement got a

great impetus from the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon. Bengal rose to a man against this imperialist design calculated to emasculate Bengal, and Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950), the grandson of Rajnarain Bose, actively worked for the organisation of the revolutionary movement.

It was keenly felt that the then-prevailing system of education which was wholly government-controlled was detrimental to the growth of national consciousness in the minds of the youth of our country. Historical facts were deliberately distorted to suit the interest of the British rules, and the Indian nation and its achievements were contemptuously belittled in the text books. To counteract these pernicious evils, the movement of National Education was started. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Bipinchandra Pal (1858-1932), Aurobindo Ghose, Ramendrasundar Trivedi, Hiren-dranath Datta and other prominent men of Bengal took active part in establishing the National Council of Education. The Council declared "Education—scientific, literary and technical, on national lines and under national control" as its objective. The idea of the National University was Rabindranath's and it received ready response from the leaders of the nationalist movement. Rabindranath drafted the syllabus of studies for the College to be started under the auspices of the National Council of Education.

Bipinchandra Pal, the most clear-thinking of all the leaders of the nationalist movement, said in one of his memorable speeches in 1907:

And what is the sort of education that you have been receiving all these years? It has had precious little reference to your own life, to the actualities of your own national history. Not even it has had any reference,—attempt is being made only recently, it has had very little reference,—to your physical surroundings. You would learn botany by British specimens and not by Indian specimens.....We have been taught to botanise the oak, to botanise

the elm, to botanise the beech to the neglect of our banyan, our Mango Grove, our Champak tree, to the neglect of the flora of our country.... This education was introduced by the English Government.... specifically for their own benefit.... English education had to be imparted with a view to raise up a class of men who would be able to serve the Government. That was one object. It had to be imparted, secondly, to create a class of men, whose interests would be indissolubly bound up with the interests of the Government..... The time, therefore, has come when in the interests of the intellectual life of the nation, nay more than that, in the interest of the nation itself, you and I should take up the charge of educating the people in our own hands, so that we may direct the mind of the nation, the will of the nation, the heart of the nation, the energy of the nation, with a view to realisation of the destiny of the nation. (*National Education*).

Aurobindo Ghosh and Rabindranath Tagore wrote profoundly on the subject of national education. From Rabindranath the Swadeshi movement received not only the gift of soul-stirring songs and poems, it got revealing writings on the true significance of India's historical development, on village reconstruction, co-operative movement, language problem and literature.

The idea of the boycott of British goods was not Rabindranath's but it was Rabindranath who presented to his countrymen an elaborate scheme for the boycott of the administration and to dissociate voluntarily from all association with the official activities of the Government. In short, it was passive resistance which was preached by Rabindranath to his countrymen. The concept of a new patriotism originated with Bipinchandra Pal and Rabindranath Tagore. In the pregnant words of the former:

The old patriotism panted for the realities of Europe and America only under an Indian name: not for the realities of India,—not its colour and contour, not its tone and expression, not its ideals and associations; but only its name was the object of our love then.... The one great good that the social and religious reactions of the last twenty years have done is to cure us, to a very large extent of this old, this unreal, this imaginary and abstract patriotism. Love of India now means a loving regard for the very configurations of this continent,—a love for its rivers and mountains, for its paddy fields and its arid sandy plains, its towns and villages, however uncouth or insanitary these might be, a love for the flora and fauna of India, an affectionate regard for its natural beauties, and even for its wild and ugly exuberance of vegetation, a love for its sweating swarthy populations, unshod and unclad; a love for the dirt-clothed village urchins, unwashed and unkempt, for the village wives and maidens, innocent of culture and civilisation, as culture and civilisation are usually understood, a love as Rabindranath put it the other day at the Classic Theatre, for the muddy weed-entangled village lanes, the moss-covered stinky village ponds, and for the poor, the starved, the malaria-stricken peasant population of the country, love for its languages, its literatures, its philosophies, its religions, a love for its culture and civilisation;—this is the characteristic of this new patriotism.

Moreover, this nationalism as preached by Rabindranath and Bipinchandra was not at all a sectarian nationalism. It was not Hindu nationalism or Muslim nationalism. It was what Bipinchandra Pal had called the 'composite nationalism'. In 1905 writing about composite patriotism, he declared:



It views India not as belonging either to the Hindus, though they were among the earliest colonisers of the country, nor to the Mahomedans, who owned sovereign authority over it for many a century in the immediate past, but to both of these two great communities equally. Nor can we overlook the other comparatively smaller communities, who have from older times shared our common culture, history and civilisation. Even the aboriginal and backward races constitute a vital element of the Indian people, and their interests and claims must be regarded as sacred and inviolable by the country. These are all limbs and organs of the new Indian nation, and national advancement in India means not the advancement of any particular section, or even of a few dominant sections, but of the whole nation, of every limb and organ of it, according to its own inner constitution and along the lines of its own past historic evolution.

This vision of the composite nationalism blossomed into the great poem of Rabindranath—*On the shore of India's Ocean of Universal Humanity* "No one shall be turned away from the shore of India's universal humanity. Come Hindu, come Musalman, come Christian, come, you the people of England, come one and all, mingle and be one". And Bipinchandra in one of his magnificent speeches declared in 1907: "Patriotism is an absolute virtue; and if it is to be limited by any consideration, it is to be limited by a consideration of Universal Humanity, and by no other consideration; patriotic sentiment must be cultivated consistently with the cultivation of love for Universal Humanity".

Thus, on the one hand Hindu revivalism-cum-nationalism was rejected for the ideal of composite nationalism, on the other hand, nationalism was linked up with universal humanity. Indian nationalism at its best, rejected tribalism,

sectarianism and national jingoism; moreover it had discovered that there was no conflict between the aspirations of the national being of India and the ideal of universal humanity.

Once the ideals were clearly enunciated and firmly grasped, the leaders of the Swadeshi movement took upon themselves the task of determining political objectives and political tasks.

The ideal of 'loyal patriotism' as advocated by Pheroze-shah Mehta and men of his thinking, was scornfully rejected. In the columns of *New India*, Bipinchandra Pal wrote on 25 February 1905: "Our ideal may be, indeed is, we freely confess, revolutionary, but not by revolutionary methods do we seek nor can we either hope to realise this ideal. Our highest patriotic ideal is loyal, but only in the sense that it is law-abiding, and in no other".

Bipinchandra further wrote: "Loyalty as a personal sentiment however can never grow under existing conditions among us and has no reality in the country.... No Englishman could be sincerely loyal to a Power that had reduced him to the political position and status which the Indian subjects of King Edward enjoy now..... After the loud and universal protestations of our loyalty at the Delhi Durbar of 1877, came the Arms Act and the Vernacular Press Act of Lord Lytton..... And if from these the conclusion be irresistible that those whose confidence we desire to win are not deceived by our loud protestations of loyalty, why waste our energy then in this futile attempt?"

The junk of 'loyal patriotism' of the Moderate School of nationalists was thus jettisoned and the impossibility of any Indian to feel loyal to the British Crown was openly expressed. There should be no more petition to the Government and no more tearful prayers to the foreign rulers. The new spirit of patriotism was stirring the hearts of the people.

Giving voice to that new spirit Bipinchandra wrote on 1 October 1906; "The old attitude of dependence has been changed.....The old idea was to get political rights and privileges from the Government. The new hope is to help the people to grow into these by their own internal strength and evolution. The spirit that is abroad in India today is the spirit of self-assertion and self-reliance. It is the spirit of a sensitive patriotism that can brook, neither in thought nor in deed, any shape or form of dependence and servitude". And Rabindranath reminded his countrymen that it was far better to take out the weeds from our own field than to wait and beg at the door of the rulers in England.

The ideal of complete autonomy and complete freedom from British control was born with the Swadeshi movement. There was no half-way house between independence and slavery. The leaders of the Swadeshi movement did not indulge in the juridical casuistry of making a distinction between independence and complete independence.

In *Bande Mataram*, the paper of militant nationalism, Bipinchandra Pal wrote: "The time has come when in the interest of truth and civic advancement and the freedom of the people, our British friends should be distinctly told that while we are thankful to them for all the kind things they have done to make our lot easy and their yoke light, we can not any longer suffer to be guided by them in our attempts for political progress and emancipation. Their viewpoint is not ours; they desire to make the Government of India popular without ceasing in any sense to be essentially British. We desire to make it autonomous, absolutely free of the British control".

This was the unequivocal and unmistakable declaration of the Swadeshi movement. This was the Swaraj, the Swaraj acquired by our own hands, "a real People's Swaraj", in the words of Bipinchandra "The Swaraj of the Indian People, not of any section of it", that became the goal of the Swadeshi movement.

The question arose in the minds of the people and their leaders—What were the ways and means of acquiring Swaraj? The answer that was given to this question was neither vague, nor platitudinous. It did not speak airily of self-help and self-assertion. It laid down a concrete programme for the achievement of Swaraj. Passive Resistance was advocated. Rabindranath Tagore had consistently preached the necessity of dissociating ourselves completely from the company of the officials and rulers, for establishing our own institutions for imparting national education and for using our indigenous products as far as practicable. Passive Resistance included practically everything. It included the organisation of our national education, the organisation of our own cottage industries, and the boycott movement. Passive Resistance was not a movement of negation, it had a positive side. The resources of the people must be mobilised so that the people may oppose the Government by setting up its own institutions—educational, economic and political.

Passive Resistance as visualised by the leaders of the Swadeshi movement was not a passive affair by any means. Bipinchandra Pal in his memorable speech *Swaraj: its ways and means*, delivered in Madras in 1907, said:

And if you ask me to state in general terms what are the methods, and the means, what are the instruments that will further this ideal of Swaraj in this country, my reply shall be that these means and methods are included under what is known in political science as the methods of Passive Resistance. Passive Resistance is not the antonym of active resistance. There can be no resistance which is not an active resistance. . . . What then does Passive Resistance mean? It means not resistance that is not active resistance, but resistance that is not aggressive resistance. Passive Resistance is not non-active resistance but non-aggressive resistance. We stand upon our rights. We stand within the limits of the law that we have still in the country. We shall respect that

law.....as long as that law shall respect our primary rights which constitute the authority of every Government, whether that Government be a despotic Government or a Constitutional Government, but rights which no Government can create and which therefore no Government can destroy. As long as the laws of this Government shall respect our primary rights, of life and person, of property and the similar primary rights, so long we propose to ourselves to be within the bounds of law; and Passive Resistance means resistance offered by a people from within the limits of such law.

As has been pointed out earlier, Passive Resistance included the boycott movement. So, the boycott movement, the potent weapon against the economic interest of British imperialism, was strongly advocated and launched. But boycott movement in itself was a negative movement, it was undertaken to further a positive aim—the growth of India's indigenous arts and industries. Said Bipinchandra in 1907: "Protection with a view to control foreign markets is absolutely impossible in India. But we can by regulating the consumption have some sort of protection to our indigenous arts and industries; and the regulation of consumption is the economic principle that underlies the Boycott Movement. Boycott to us is protection; it is the imposition of protective tariffs upon the people themselves,.....indirectly upon foreign imports also".

But the boycott of foreign goods was never undertaken blindly, without taking into consideration all its economic pros and cons. People were asked to support home industries as far as practicable, and not to use foreign goods if thereby the production of our own indigenous goods suffered. Dwelling on the subject of boycott, Bipinchandra said: "In the application we have laid special stress upon three or four things, ....namely, upon cloth, salt, sugar and enamelled ware, and partly upon glass-ware, and generally articles of luxury. This is the extent of our boycott. We never proposed to boycott every foreign article".

But, was boycott only an economic measure undertaken to give protection to our indigenous arts and industries? Was it the expression of what could be termed as economic Swadeshim? The moderate wing of the Indian nationalists always spoke about boycott as an economic measure. They spoke *ad nauseum* about economic Swadeshim. Bipinchandra Pal knocked the bottom out of this ignorant assertion. He said: "Economic Swadeshim may be possible in a free country. . . . It may be possible in a country which governs itself and has made considerable progress in the manufacture of commodities. Economic Swadeshim may be possible, for instance, in self-governing England which has developed manufacturing industries to so large an extent. But a nation that comes low in the field of world competition, a nation that has at its command almost endless natural resources, a nation that is capable of producing almost infinite quantities of raw materials but that has not the means and appliances of working out finished commodities from all these raw materials,—for such a nation, *specially when it is under the domination of another nation* (the emphasis is mine—S.T.), a commercial nation, a manufacturing nation, which controls and regulates the fiscal policy of the people in the interest not unfrequently of the rulers, the manufacturing country, *for such a nation economic Swadeshim is an utter impossibility*". (the emphasis is mine—S.T.).

Economics is never divorced from politics and therefore economic Swadeshim or 'honest Swadeshim' as the British rulers asked the Indians to practise, was an impossibility. In the words of Bipinchandra Pal: "Consider their programme of honest, non-political purely economic Swadeshim as. . . unreal". The boycott movement was also not a purely economic movement. In the words of Bipinchandra:

It is a political weapon, it is a weapon of Passive Resistance. It is a weapon that is capable of retaliating the inequality that is inflicted upon us by the domination of another people. . . . It is a movement

of the determination of the people not only to save the industries of the nation but also to create those forces in our community which...will work out the problem of Swaraj .....In this Boycott and by this Boycott we propose to create in the people a consciousness of the Pararaj on the one hand, and the desire for Swaraj on the other. It is by the assertion of the determination of the people against the despotism of the Government, within absolutely legal bounds, that we can hope to kill the Maya that has overcome us. And that is the end of Boycott politically. By it we shall reduce the Government to the pound-of-flesh rule.

The setting up of a parallel machinery of administration was also contemplated. That would mean a training in the art of self-government. But that was possible only if the village could be organised. The organisation of the village-life was therefore considered a matter of great importance by the leaders of the Swadeshi movement. Rabindranath wrote innumerable articles on village-life and its problems, and on village reconstruction. Village organisation must lay the foundation of Swaraj—that was the message of Rabindranath Tagore. Bipinchandra Pal also dealt with it in his writings and speeches. He said in his speech on Boycott: "Boycott may do all these things, but without positive training no self-government will come to the boycotter. It will have to be done through the organisation of our village life, organisation of our talukas and districts. Let our programme include the setting up of a machinery for popular administration, running parallel to but independent of, the existing administration of the Government."

In the Swadeshi movement the nationalist thought in India had reached its highest pinnacle. In the realm of the ideal, it had admitted Universal Humanity to be the ideal to which nationalism owed its allegiance. In the field of the practical, it had worked out a concrete programme

which included Passive Resistance, boycott, national education, village reconstruction, and the setting up of a parallel machinery of administration. The depth of its thoughts and the magnificence of its pronouncements were never surpassed by anything that was thought and said in the course of the nationalist movement that flowed out of the Swadeshi upsurge.

In his programme of the non-cooperation movement, Mahatma Gandhi took up practically the entire programme of the Swadeshi movement and, by the extraordinary dynamism of his personality, made the ideas reach every nook and corner of India. Never before were millions of people of this vast land touched by ideas and actions as they were during the non-cooperation days. But in the process of popularising the ideas that were born in the Swadeshi movement, elements of revivalism and narrow chauvinism crept in, in spite of the emphasis on non-violence and humanism by Gandhiji, and particularly so in the sphere of culture and cultural values.

Thus, what the ideals of the Swadeshi movement gained by popularisation, they lost in rationality and depth in the period of the non-cooperation movement.



## REVOLUTIONARY TERRORISM

*Gopal Halder*

'Storming heaven': these historic words are perhaps the aptest description of the bold fight for freedom which the revolutionaries of Bengal and India launched and continued, for about thirty years, against the mightiest empire of history. It required courage no doubt, the courage to *do and die* when for generations Indians of light and leading had been taught to beg and pray. More even than that, it required imagination and faith in the National Destiny. For, these revolutionaries dreamt the dreams which came true and remained unshaken in their belief at an hour when 'responsible citizens' looked confused and crushed at the very idea of full freedom and the responsibility such freedom would entail. The seeds had been sown earlier by men of vision and courage; but the plant of freedom was watered with the martyrs' blood. It was their revolutionary lot to have the soil watered and not to reap the fruit; no, for many of them, not even to see it in bloom. They were giving themselves, in most cases unknown and unhonoured, to the cause, to live or die as in the Task-master's eye, until the goal of freedom was at last accepted as the national objective. The national organisations were thus won over from passivity and vacillation to revolutionary and uncompromising struggle for freedom; and, violent or non-violent, constitutional or unlawful, whatever be the

methods, all popular forces including themselves merged into the revolutionary struggle against imperialism.

Freedom was the issue, and not this or that method, as in the perspective of history we can see clearly today. For, methods and techniques of the freedom movement varied as they must according to times and circumstances. The zig-zag course of Indian freedom was naturally marked by a variety of methods and techniques. Each of them had, however, its genesis in the national life, and, to look deeper, in the very complexities of that life. As such, the Grand Strategy of Freedom needed them all. To distinguish any section of the national force merely by its apparent technique and method is to confuse largely the means with the end; and, secondly to lose sight of the inner connection among the different forces of the national life. National freedom is a complex process of development. The main features have undoubtedly to be recognized as they distinguished each particular section of the freedom fighters of India. The popular term 'Revolutionary Terrorism', which we employ, serves a useful purpose to describe a pattern of activity pursued for a prolonged period of 30 years, from 1904 to 1934. We realize now the role the nationalist revolutionaries played in the development and transformation of Indian politics as a whole. The technique and features of their fight have also to be studied now with care with the full perspective in view. These in the past were often improperly emphasized in order to throw the picture of revolutionary contribution out of focus.

'Revolutionary Terrorism', both in its origin and growth, was no simple phenomenon. It was not confined to Bengal; the freedom movement in other parts of India, particularly in the Punjab and Northern India, was also marked at certain periods by revolutionary terrorism. So, at the outset we should note the broad facts and salient features of the Bengal movement as we have known it here.

First, the revolutionaries did not belong to a single unified party, but were divided into a number of secret groups, generally working independently. Second, they did not subscribe to any common ideology but expressed the common nationalist aspiration for full freedom and a common faith in armed revolution. Third, the common features of their 'terrorism' were organisation of secret societies, anti-imperialist indoctrination of their members, physical and moral training, collection of firearms, collection of funds by dacoities, assassination by bombs and firearms of enemies and traitors. Fourth, by no means were all who belonged to these revolutionary secret societies reconciled to all such activities (see Jadugopal Mukhopadhyay's *Biplavi Jivaner Smriti*). Many of them accepted these as temporary and unwelcome devices of defence and counter-attack. Almost all took to these as necessary steps in the process of revolution, in the preparation for guerilla campaigns, defection of Indian forces, and finally, for armed insurrection on a wide and national scale. A good number valued the method as calling for maximum sacrifice by minimum men to draw out by their examples at least minimum sacrifice by maximum men in the cause of national freedom. Fifth, it is also to be noted that as opportunities presented themselves, in the national and international fields, the revolutionary terrorists tried to take advantage of them and varied their method and technique in accordance with the requirements of the situation. Lastly, most of the leaders of the groups, like Sri Aurobindo himself, had probably an exaggerated notion about the role of the middle-class intelligentsia in the national democratic revolution. The democratic content was relatively weak in their political consciousness and of course it was alien to their methods of organisation which were intended to be military and secret.

Bearing in mind this particular aspect we have to look deeper into the Bengali life and movements since the last quarter of the 19th century if we are to understand why revolutionary terrorism had such a prolonged existence in

particular in Bengal from 1904 to 1934. We can then proceed to study the different phases of the movement as it waxed or waned.

### *I. The Background: Renaissance and Revolutionary Ideas*

"The spirit of freedom", writes Bipinchandra Pal in recalling the birth of 'Our New Nationalism' in the seventies of the last century, "quickened by contact with modern European thought and history, throbbing under the new impulse imparted by idealism of the French Revolution, was abroad" (*Memories of My Life and Times*, Vol. I, p. 237). The literary and cultural renaissance in Bengal was in high tide in the seventies of the last century. The spirit of freedom that it generated challenged the religious and social authorities with all its might. But very naturally it perceived that a challenge to the political authorities of the land was out of the question. The liberal attitude was to look for help from the rulers for ordered progress; the nationalist attitude as expressed through the Hindu Mela (1867) was to inculcate a movement of self-reliance, and self-respect. During Lord Lytton's viceroyalty (1876-1880), educated Indians of different schools of thought came to realize that the authorities would not allow any free development of Indian political life. Secret societies were a natural offshoot of this political feeling, and the feeling was specially acerbated by the Vernacular Press Act and the Arms Act of Lord Lytton.

#### *(i) Secret Societies of the Seventies*

So while the liberal Anandamohan Bose gathered the students of Calcutta in the first organised Students' Association (1875) and Surendranath Banerji raised "the storm in the College Square" with his orations there on Josef Mazzini and the 'New Italy' movement (1875), we are told, on the authority of Bipinchandra Pal (*ibid*), that "Calcutta student community was at that time honey-combed with" secret organisations. Surendranath himself

is said to have been the President of a number of such groups. Bipinchandra was writing about 1932, when the wave of Revolutionary Terrorism was touching its peak in Bengal and he is careful to remind the readers that these organisations of the seventies "were without any revolutionary motive or any plan of secret assassination as the way to national emancipation" (unlike those of the 20th century) and their "thought and imagination alone were of a revolutionary character". He refers to one such organisation, probably to the one that Sibnath Sastri and his friends initiated (*Atma Charit*, Sibnath Sastri). Rabindranath Tagore in a humorous description refers to a different one, the *Sanjibani Sabha*. It was founded by Rajnarayan Bose, the grand-father of Indian revolutionism and Hindu Nationalism, and young Jyotirindranath Tagore; and Rabindranath, then a lad of fifteen only, also was a member of it (see *Jivan Smriti*). This too contemplated no action in near future to overthrow the foreign yoke. All probably died a natural death and none constituted any danger to the regime.

What however is to be noted from such attempts is this: first, a revolutionary temper was being created. Secondly, secret societies came to be regarded as natural. British liberalism was passing into arrogant Imperialism from about the time of Lord Lytton's viceroyalty in India. The educated intelligentsia of Bengal had frequent clashes with the foreign rulers and their henchmen, as at the last session of Hindu Mela (see Pal on Hindu Mela, *ibid*). Serious-minded men were thus forced to realise that secret organisations were needed for maintenance of national and personal honour.

But as yet the secret societies of Calcutta had no idea of direct action, nor felt any need of it. The task they set before themselves was ideological and physical training. Two other features are worth noting, namely that it is the students and the educated youngmen who form the

basis of the movement; and that, while vows and rituals associated with Hinduism marked the initiation into some of these societies, Mazzini and 'Young Italy', the anti-Czarist secret organisations, as well as the American War of Independence were their real political inspiration.

(ii) *The Middle Class in Isolation*

These features point to the basic complexity of our colonial social existence. Political consciousness had undoubtedly been quickened by contact with modern European thought and history. But it had been quickened only among a very small minority, a section of the urban middle class in particular, for they alone could avail of the new education. It is the youngmen of this *bhadralok* section, the students generally, who "throbbed with the impulse imparted by idealism of the French Revolution", and liberals like Anandamohan Bose and Surendranath Banerji had to direct their activities largely to these educated youths. Not that there were no other sectors seething with discontent under British rule. The Revolt of 1857 showed how deep and widespread was the rebellious mood in Northern India in general. The 'Indigo Revolt' of 1859-62 and the Peasant *Samiti* movement in Pabna (1873) showed that even in Bengal there existed a popular revolutionary base, composed of the peasants and the rural poor. But the Bengali *bhadraloks* could not identify themselves with the cause of such 'lower classes'. Socially and economically they belonged to the semi-feudal middle classes in Bengal; they thrived on the zamindari system which had created a chain of middle interests. In spite of the idealism that the French Revolution imparted to them, they could not be identified with the forces of social revolution in the country and accept the anti-feudal struggle of the peasantry as their own. They sought to make a distinction between *political emancipation* and *social revolution* and desired to concentrate all their attention on the former.

Besides the basic difference in social interests, the situation came to be complicated more with time as the middle classes of Bengal were almost entirely Hindu in faith and the toiling masses were largely Muslims and the latter had no share in the renaissance, reformation and political awakening of Bengal. Third, the 'new education' again, imparted exclusively through English, had increasingly cut off the educated section from the uneducated masses and the intellectual and psychological hiatus between the two classes became larger and larger. The educated classes could not and did not carry the uneducated masses along with them. Their attention moreover was devoted to the glorification of the Hindu past of India and to the organisation of the politically advanced Hindu youths. This complex religious, social and intellectual condition in Bengal favoured the growth of revolutionary terrorism as a desperate weapon of a patriotic middle class. Denied all power and honour, subjected to humiliation, the class was cut off from the real revolutionary mass base. It could not see its way to politicise and radicalise the masses as it desired—nor champion the anti-feudal struggle of the masses with needed social justice. It was thrown upon itself and naturally took to desperate action and secrecy.

Of course a fourth and subjective factor in the case of the Bengalis was the common jibe against them that they were "soft and effeminate"; the "Babus" "talked loud" and were cowardly and afraid of action. As such it was said that the Bengalis were born to be mere clerks and slaves. The renaissance poetry of Bengal urged the Bengalis to wipe out this stigma on their manhood and prove their worth in patriotic adventure however fruitless. Further, colonial conditions deprived the youths of all normal channels of noble adventure. They were disarmed and excluded from all military service and naturally turned to any desperate course of action they could find to realise their dreams of heroism and patriotism.

Bankimchandra, who came to be regarded as the *Rishi* of the *Bande Mataram*, illustrates this dilemma of the Bengali soul. In the earlier numbers of the *Bangadarsan* (1873-75) Bankimchandra discussed with high competence the peasant problem of Bengal and on this background he examined the question of *Samya*, communism and the political philosophy of the founders of the First International. The masculinity of Bankim's genius is stamped almost on every one of these early essays in which he upheld the cause of social justice and social transformation. In course of the next ten years his genius without losing its high quality underwent a different sort of transformation that is seen in the *Anandamath* (1882). This presented a very different picture of revolt and a very different idea of a revolutionary organisation—a band of *sannyasins* vowed to celibacy and revolutionary action. It appeared that a puritanically trained and secretly armed guerilla band could accomplish the desired liberation. That is exactly the solution that the Bengali educated *bhadralok* in their isolation from the masses and in the desperation of the situation wished for and no wonder *Anandamath* was accepted as Bankim's highest testament of philosophy and patriotism. And it was this later Bankim that Sri Aurobinda hailed as "the seer and the nation-builder".

(iii) '*Hindu Nationalism*'—*Bankim and Vivekananda, Tilak and Aurobinda*

The basic complexity of the situation came to be more complicated in the nineties of the last century by the attitude and measures on the one hand of British imperialism and by the growth of nascent nationalism on the other into a full-blooded and dynamic force as 'Hindu Nationalism'. The Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 by Indo-British liberal political leaders. It successfully united the Indian people for the first time in their history on a common political platform. The small band of liberal leaders year after year begged and prayed for "greater association of Indians



in the administration of India" and that prayer was uncere-  
moniously disposed of by imperialist politicians (e.g. the  
'reforms' of 1892). In this the Congress had failed to reflect  
the opinion of the larger section of the educated people, or  
realize the depth of their feelings with regard to freedom  
and the destiny of their country. The Renaissance had led  
to a rediscovery of the India of the ages past. A religious  
awakening was in force. It was represented no longer only  
by the Brahmo Samaj and the Prarthana Samaj liberals, but  
by Sri Ramakrishna's followers and Arya Samajist Hindus  
also.

This religious awakening lent its support to Hindu  
Revivalism and strengthened the feelings of respect for na-  
tional traditions. The Gita, more than the Upanishad, came  
to acquire a new importance in the national life and nation-  
alist thought; a philosophy of selfless action (*niskam karma*)  
got priority over that of self-searching (*atmanam biddhi*)  
meditation. Bankim—the 'later Bankim' as we know,—and  
Vivekananda more than Bankim, reawakened a sense of  
pride in the Hindu past. Both of them helped to kindle a  
kind of militant courage and selfless service for the *daridra*  
*narayan* and for the motherland. The turning point in  
national life was reached about the year 1893-94, and not  
so much with the foundation of the Congress in 1885.

In 1893 Bengal was excited over Vivekananda's triumph  
at the Chicago Congress of Religions, and Hindu Nationa-  
lism surged on now with a new vigour and new life in  
Bengal. Aurobinda—a grandchild of Rajnarayan Bose, it  
should be remembered—returned to India (to Baroda in  
Gujrat) in 1893, and launched in the *Indu Prakash* (*New*  
*Lamps for Old*, 7 August 1893) of Bombay his fierce tirade  
against the 'Unnational Congress'. "The Congress was play-  
ing with bubbles", he held, and declared his messianic  
faith: "the proletariat is the real key" (*Indu Prakash*,  
5 March 1894—quoted by Girijasankar Choudhuri in  
*Sri Aurobindo*). This key however was beyond his reach;

so he came to accept the middle class as the source of rebel strength. In 1893 also, Maharashtra was being stirred into activity by a similar wave of Hindu Nationalism. Lokmanya Tilak in Poona was its eminent exponent in the *Kesari*. It led next year to the reorientation of the *Ganpati Utsav* (Sept. 1894) and the *Sivaji Utsav* for political purposes and militant dreams (*Rowlatt Committee Report*). The same year when Bankimchandra passed away Aurobindo contributed to the *Indu Prakash* his seven essays on Bankim (16 July to 27 August 1894; also see Chaudhuri's *Aurobindo*). He could discern "the embryo of a new generation" in Bengal, "a generation National to a fault, loving Bengal and her new glories".

There was truth in that vision as we know, though Aurobindo himself as yet had little first hand knowledge of this Bengal. For earlier in the same year, even before Bankim was laid to his rest, we can discover the new voice of Bengal speaking through that noble poem of Rabindranath's, *char phirao more*: in anguish of soul the poet called the new generation to "turn away" and (even before Vivekananda had returned to India with his experience of socialist thought in Europe to formulate his doctrine of service to the *daridra narayan*) dedicate their lives to the service of the dumb millions who had neither speech nor food. The freedom of spirit was indeed by now yearning for positive and national action. Hindu Nationalism gave it a new life and vigour over the two widely separated but politically advanced regions, Bengal and Maharashtra. Men like Aurobindo touched the two ends; while Bankim and Vivekananda, and, to some extent, Rabindranath, strengthened the new forces in Bengal, Tilak headed the Hindus in Maharashtra.

The French Revolution and the New Italy were still there, but the life-blood of the movement was now sought to be drawn from the national sources, the philosophy of the Gita. Bankim, Tilak and Aurobindo, all offered it as the

gospel to the new generation—a gospel of *Dharma-Yuddha* or Righteous War.

A new cult was rising about the same time, the cult of *Sakti*, with the Bengali goddess Kali or her Maharashtra equivalent Bhabani as the central figure. Sivaji was associated with the grace of Bhabani. Bankimchandra's *Anandamath* started a new cult, the cult of the Motherland as the Goddess Durga and it proved to be the most powerful cult of the twentieth century. Vivekananda and his Irish disciple, Sister Nivedita (Margaret Noble), who knew the Master's mind better than most Indian men and women, injected into the Bengal revolutionary thought a good dose of that cult of Kali the Terrible and helped in the growth of that mystic faith in Tantrik philosophy of the Destructive Power. Aurobindo, the visionary, was to combine all this, Kali the Dark Power of Tantra, Bhabani the goddess of victory, and the majestic Durga the symbol of the mother country, into a new religio-revolutionary faith in his *Bhabani-Mandir* (1906).

The philosophical and the moral fountain-head for the revolutionaries was thus the Gita and its doctrine of selfless fight against Evil. The method and means sought, however, to be adopted by the revolutionaries were not dictated by Hindu Nationalism but were borrowed from the examples of the French Revolution, American War of Independence and the revolutionary secret societies of the West, those of Italy, Russia, Ireland. The plan was to start with secret societies, collection of funds by violence and arms, terrorism, guerilla bands etc., and end in an uprising. Aurobindo was pre-eminently fitted to unite the two ideas of the East and West. He had thought of these even in his Cambridge days—secret societies, terrorism, bombs, and recovery of the Hindu heritage. As he arrived in Baroda, he found a ready atmosphere to confirm his faith in the plan and method. The religious bias remained very strong in Bengal's revolutionary terrorist groups at least till the end of the

First World War (1918), and the Hindu bias in their nationalism persisted even later, for the rise of Muslim communalism alienated the Muslims further from the national struggle for freedom.

*II. Revolutionary Terrorism: The First Phase (1902-14)*  
*(i) Early Indications (1897-1906)*

The first indications of revolutionary conspiracy, after the suppression of the Wahabi movement in the last quarter of the 19th century, can be traced to Maharashtra and to Poona in particular. Militant Hindu nationalism had been stirring there since 1894. In 1897, the Chapekar brothers murdered two British officers for their oppressive methods during the plague outbreak of the year in that city. Lokmanya Tilak's complicity in the matter was not proved, though he was imprisoned on a charge of sedition for his articles against oppressive methods of the British in his paper, the *Kesari*. The Chapekars were sentenced to death; but the spirit was far from being crushed. Revolutionary secret societies continued their silent activities in that region of India through *akhras* or clubs of physical exercise which arranged for study of the literature of European secret societies and anarchism as well. Aurobindo Ghose, Vice-President of the Maharaja's College at Baroda, was said to have headed the Gujrat branch of such revolutionary societies, and Swamji Krishnavarma from Kathiawad and the Savarkar brothers of Nasik were the other leading figures. They would come to the forefront of the movement when Bengal plunged headlong into the Swadeshi Movement (1905 onwards). Revolutionary terrorism surged up in Bengal at the crest of that patriotic wave. In Western India, after that, its activities were only spasmodic.

But terrorism had not found at first a ready home in Bengal. Aurobindo had drawn around him at Baroda his first followers. Jatindranath Bandyopadhyay (later known as Niralamba Swami) was one of them; he had gone there

by himself to join the Baroda State army and secure military training for the war of freedom. Barindrakumar Ghosh, Aurobindo's youngest brother, was another; he was to be the second in command of the organisation when it would start. The two were sent to Bengal in 1902 for that purpose, but returned shortly after disappointed with the 'apathy' of the Bengalis.

Revolutionary societies had indeed already appeared in Bengal, though they were not yet prepared for terrorism or direct action. P. Mitter (Pramathanath Mitra), Barrister-at-Law, had founded the Anushilan Samiti about 1897; it devoted its attention, like the Maharashtra *akhras*, to physical and moral training of young men, to raise, as Mitter desired, a patriotic generation of fighters. Sarala Devi (later Mrs. Devi Chaudhurani) was running similar clubs. As the name 'Anushilan' indicated, Mitter upheld Bankim's philosophy of *anushilan*, the religion of culture and training. Mitter had a distaste for the wordy politics of his friends of the Indian National Congress; he drew around him a large and growing band of serious-minded people who believed in the preparation for revolution. He did not hesitate to welcome Jatindranath and Barindra into the fold of the Anushilan Samiti in 1904. They had then returned to Calcutta for the second time on the eve of the Partition of Bengal (Oct. 1905).

That arrogant measure of Lord Curzon brought the Bengali discontent with foreign rule almost to a point of national revolt. As it intensified, Aurobindo returned to Calcutta in 1906, ostensibly as the Principal of the National College of the National Council of Education, but really to accept his destined position as the "leader and the prophet of the open National movement" and as "the demigod and creator of an underground movement too". (Barindrakumar Ghosh in the *Dawn of India*, 15 December 1933). He had some intellectual "allies" awaiting him in this work like Sister Nivedita. There were others who did not sup-

port evidently his 'terrorist' side of activity like Bipinchandra Pal, editor of the *New India* (1901-1909), P. Mitra and Sarala Devi, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay and Prince Okakura, and Rabindranath Tagore himself. But they lent moral support undoubtedly to the leadership of Aurobindo as the head of the dynamic movement for national freedom.

(ii) *The Swadeshi Movement and the Aetiology of the Bomb.* (1906-10)

The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, it is to be borne in mind, was not merely a movement of national protest against the imperialist attempt to divide the Bengali people. Nor was it only an attempt at a negative and positive socio-economical solution, boycott of British goods and encouragement of national bourgeois enterprises; nor even a mere political movement aiming at complete freedom (which some like Bipinchandra Pal had been advocating in the *New India* since 1901). Swadeshi was in fact the springtime of Bengali national life; the national soul flowered into arts and literature and music, and in economic and political and educational ventures of every description. It was the seed-time also of the all-India nationalist movement which was at that hour led by the three leaders, 'Lal-Bal-Pal', on an all-India basis. And Swadeshi breathed a new life into the revolutionary movement as well, and imparted to it the new soul that the revolutionary societies of Bengal had so long needed. Those societies had been there from an earlier era, and their methods and cults also did not originate from the Partition of Bengal and the Swadeshi movement or the Era of Repression that followed the national awakening. The incipient phase of terrorism from 1897 was over by 1905. The years 1906 to 1908 were years primarily of underground work when bombs were being prepared and tried by the band that Barindra led at the time.

The first overt act was the foundation of the Bengali weekly *Jugantar* (New Era) in March 1906 by Barindra-

kumar Ghosh with the help of his friends (Dr. Bhupendranath Dutt, the first editor, and Abinash Bhattacharya). The *Jugantar* breathed revolution in every line and pointed out how revolution can be effected, by collection of arms, seduction of armed forces, by terrorism of the Russian type, armed rising, guerilla warfare and so on. A number of clubs, less formal than the Anushilan Samities of P. Mitra, was also in the field about this time; and the *Jugantar* began to attract them with its positive doctrine of revolution. The open preaching, and perhaps the teachings as well, began to dissatisfy P. Mitter; the youngmen of the *Jugantar* had belonged to his Samiti as well. Aurobindo Ghosh and (Deshabandhu) Chittaranjan Das were the Vice-Presidents and Surendranath Tagore was the Treasurer of this Samiti then. In 1907 the youngmen led by Barin formally dissociated themselves from the Anushilan Samiti. But the times were too strong for P. Mitter to steer his own Samiti clear of the terroristic ideas and methods; and, as we would find, in the new province of East Bengal, the Anushilan Samiti branches under the leadership of Pulinbihari Das were plunging headlong into terroristic activities like dacoity and murder. Barindra and his friends conducted their underground activities from their Calcutta Centre. Hemchandra Das Quanango of Midnapore, who had been initiated by Aurobindo himself as early as 1903 (?), had returned from Paris after learning preparation of bombs. He was now busy at his work as an expert. The *Jugantar* was soon banned and its Editor (Bhupendranath) sent to prison (1907). Repression was in full swing and it was a challenge to the young revolutionaries.

The challenge had to be accepted. Bombs would be a necessary demonstration of the strength and skill of the revolutionaries, and daring action would fire the imagination of many more. Minor attempts of 1907 however failed. The blow that shocked the liberal politicians and electrified the whole country—even far off Maharashtra, as we know—was the bomb that was meant for Kingsford, the

District Judge of Muzaffarpur (then in West Bengal), but killed two innocent European ladies on 30 April 1908. Prafulla Chaki was one of the young revolutionaries responsible for the action and rather than be arrested by the police he committed suicide. The other youngman was Kshudiram (Bose). He stood the trial and paid the highest penalty—to be enshrined in folksongs as Bengal's first martyr in the cause of liberation. His death was mourned even then almost openly by the educated Bengalis at large. The torch had been lighted that all the waters of the Ganga could not quench in the next quarter of a century.

The bomb outrage at Muzaffarpur was followed by searches by the police and the discovery on 2 May 1908 of the Maniktolla 'factory' of Barindra and his friends. This led to the arrest of almost the entire group including its head, Aurobindo Ghosh. Thirtyfour of them were sent up for trial at the Alipur Sessions Court in connection with what came to be known as the Alipur Bomb Case. Aurobindo was acquitted by that Court on 6 May 1909 and only fifteen of them were ultimately found guilty by the High Court (10 February 1910) of a "conspiracy to wage war against the King-Emperor", and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment and transportation.

It was a trial of historic importance. First, because the accused stood the ordeal undaunted and unconcerned; Barindra, Upendra Banerji and Ullaskar Datta became legendary figures in the imagination of their people. Second, even as the trial proceeded, one of the accused, Naren Gossain, who had turned 'approver' and was for safety segregated in jail, was killed there in Presidency Jail, Alipur, by his two co-accused, Kanailal Datta and Satyendra Bose. The pistols for the purpose had been smuggled into the jail by some mysterious means. Each of the two, Kanailal and Satyen, claimed to be the sole perpetrator of the daring act and declared the other to be innocent; and both paid the highest penalty of law with a courage and



patriotic exultation that thrilled their fellow countrymen. The Jail outrage carefully planned and skilfully executed by the youngmen was admiringly commented on even by foreign revolutionary circles, like *L' Humanite* of Paris (Bhupendranath Datta—*Second War of Independence in India*, in Bengali, p. 60). Revolutionary morale reached its high watermark thanks to Khudiram and Prafulla Chaki, Kanailal and Satyen, and their action as well as their conduct, more even than that of Barindra and others, set the standard which those who came after them were equally zealous to emulate. Third, other acts of terrorist vengeance in connection with the case had followed: the murder of the police inspector who had apprehended Khudiram (in Nov. 1908), of the Government pleader Asutosh Biswas (10 Feb. 1909), and of the Superintendent of Police (C.I.D.) Samshul Alam who was all through in charge of it (Jan. 1910).

Fourth, the trial of Aurobindo brought the Deshabandhu C. R. Das to the forefront of professional and political platform. He felt called upon to defend the "prophet of patriotism" for nothing, and defended Aurobindo with a passionate adoration and legal acumen that resulted in his acquittal. Das himself was probably never a believer in revolutionary terrorism, but he remained the best legal shield of the revolutionaries ever after.

Fifth and last, Aurobindo had started on a new road of spiritual realisation. As a young visionary he had earnestly thought at first of regaining the roots of his being in Nationalism. He had even thought of winning the fight for freedom in conjunction with the proletariat which he did not know at all. He was then forced to rely on his own class, the educated middle classes, but sought at the same time to tap the mysterious sources of *Sakti* (Power) and religious forces for that high mission as he conceived. In jail he devoted himself with a singleminded earnestness to know the Spirit Eternal and is said to have first visions

of it in the Court room in the person of C. R. Das. As he came out (6 May 1909) Aurobinda still continued openly to advocate the politics of nationalist extremism in the *Karma-Yogin* (June 1909) and did not repudiate terrorism as a means to wrest power. But a mysterious religious appeal was there in his utterances now; and, when another prosecution was known to be impending, he decided to fly from Calcutta (Feb. 1910) to take his refuge in French Pondicherry.

(iii) *Dacca Anushilan Samiti; the Jugantar Groups  
in the making (1910-1914)*

Aurobinda, and possibly Barindra who was transported to the Andamans, would fain cry halt to the movement of which they are held to have blazed the trail. But the spark had lighted a fire. The partition and the sweeping acts of repression undoubtedly fed the flame. The Samitis, as we have noted, had been revolutionary nurseries for restless youngmen who were all too eager to prove their mettle. The Dacca Anushilan Samiti, which enjoyed a sort of provincial autonomy in the new province of East Bengal, had been organised into a well-centralised body by Pulin Das. It had hundreds of branches under its control and it had been forced to go, whether P. Mitter knew it or not, for robbery, dacoity etc. as early as 1906, presumably because the sinews of war, arms and money, could be collected by no other means. The year 1908 was a year of rising tempo. As the Alipur Bomb Case proceeded in Calcutta, the Anushilan Samiti along with four other Samitis of East Bengal were outlawed. Pulin Das along with others (including honoured names like Krishnakumar Mitra, Aswinikumar Datta, and 'Raja' Subodh Mallik) were clapped into jail under the 'lawless law', the Regulation III of 1818. The Anushilan Samiti was far from making an exit; it separated itself from other societies and grew into a well-knit terrorist organisation. In 1910 the Dacca Conspiracy

Case was launched against its members; fifteen were sentenced to imprisonment. The Samiti was thus deprived of its leadership. But its younger men were undaunted, men like Naren Sen, Trailokyamohan Chakravarty (*Maharaj*) and Rabi Sen, who not only held together the organisation after 1910 but also spread it into new areas and established contacts almost all over Northern India. The Anushilan Samiti thus became a by-word for revolutionary action, courage, discipline, secrecy and also, unfortunately, for other less commendable aspects. Terrorism came to imply a ruthlessness whether in committing dacoities or in assassination of the rulers or their henchmen or the Samiti's suspected members, and intolerance of other revolutionary groups and opinions.

Such Samities or secret revolutionary groups were by no means few. The Swadeshi movement had encouraged the formation of such local groups and each of them in its turn had its branches. The aim and object or the method and technique were almost similar, but the counsels and loyalties of each were its own. For secret societies have to work in narrow grooves, and cannot risk their very existence in the name of revolutionary united front. The members of the original (Calcutta) Anushilan Samiti continued, for example, as before outside the Dacca terrorist circle and they came to contact or join other local bodies, like the Anushilan Samiti of Calcutta, the Uttar Banga Samiti of North Bengal, the Krishnanagore group, the Rajshahi group, the Majilpur group, the Jugantar group etc.

*Jugantar*, the suppressed weekly, had served as a rallying point for the Aurobinda-Barindra group of Calcutta, and the title stuck to others of different groups who came later to be connected with the close or distant work of the paper, like Abinash Bhattacharya, Debabrata Basu etc. So in 1910, the members of these different groups ('Bagha Jatin' or Jatindranath Mukherji was then their leader) who were being tried together in the Howrah Conspiracy

Cases were designated by the prosecution, presumably to strengthen its case, as members collectively of the 'Jugantar Party', (as distinct from those of the Anushilan Samiti by which were meant the members of the *Dacca* Anushilan only and its branches). The authorities gave a name perhaps to a thing which was going to be a reality soon. For, the name was adhered to later by these groups and others which came into existence, though these groups never merged, and the Jugantar, unlike the Anushilan, never meant anything more than a federation of revolutionary groups. What the Jugantar thus lacked in centralised leadership it made up for by a certain flexibility of mind and method and by probably the intellectual quality of its cadre.

There were other groups besides these two of major importance; and they all agreed in the method and technique of work. We have, however, to remember that except for two brief interludes, in 1914-17 and in 1925-28, the Anushilan and Jugantar never could cooperate, and co-ordination of all the groups was out of the question. The history of revolutionary terrorism in Bengal is to a great extent the history of wasteful rivalry between these two principal groups, the Anushilan and the Jugantar, which even divided the Bengal Provincial Congress leadership after the demise of Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das, more specifically from 1929 (the Subhas—Sen Gupta schism).

### *III. Terrorism and attempts at Upheaval (1914-17)*

The period of the First World War, 1914-18, witnessed an era of feverish activity, international organisational efforts and intricate plans and plots in Asia, Europe or America for a countrywide upheaval. It is a record of failure no doubt, but it showed that the revolutionaries of India were not mere 'terrorists' but possessed political vision as well as realistic understanding of the crisis which faced at the hour the British authorities in India. Though the revolutionaries were being bogged repeatedly into the morass of individual

terrorism, both military and popular upheaval for freedom was their real objective all along.

The fervid days of Swadeshi were over by 1908, and nationalist leaders were deported or imprisoned or forced to go into exile. The Morley-Minto reforms (1909) and the annulment of the Partition (1911) "rallied" the moderates around the government. The country lapsed into a liberal policy of "prayer and petition", so galling to the sense of national honour. The revolutionaries of Bengal, however, kept up their relentless struggle against foreign domination, and between 1911 and 1914 their activities came to embrace a large area of Northern India.

#### (i) *Other Indian Partners*

It should be remembered that revolutionary terrorism had other adherents in India, and the years of Bengal's Swadeshi ferment had seen them come into open action; e.g. the Savarkars and Swamji Krishnavarma of the "India House" group in London and Paris (from about 1906), the Dhingra trial in London, the Nask, Gwalior and other Conspiracy Cases (from about 1909). The Punjab was from the military point of view the key province and there the spirit of Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh created new men. Lala Hardyal, the eccentric scholar who played the most important part in the organisation of the Indian revolutionaries in Europe and the *Ghadr* movement of the Punjabi revolutionaries in America, and Bhai Parmanand, as yet a young student, who was to figure in more than one conspiracy case in the Punjab, were two of these men. The U. P. and Bihar, to a smaller extent, were being penetrated from both Bengal and the Punjab, the link being men like Rasbihari Bose (or Dehra Dun and Delhi) and Sachindra-nath Sanyal of Benares. They had contacted the Anushilan men in Calcutta. So, in December 1912 the world was astonished with the bomb outrage in Delhi, the attempt on the then Viceroy Lord Hardinge's life.

Even Madras had not altogether escaped the revolutionary infection (e.g. the Tinevelly case, 1911) and of course, there was a "Muslim current", as the Rowlatt Report called it. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was connected with the Aurobinda group (through Shamsundar Chakravarty) even in the early phase (Azad's *Autobiography*). However 'Islamic' in their profession—the others were no less 'Hindu' in their outlook—Obaidullah Sindhi and his friends were fervent patriots. More than fifty cases of dacoity, murder and attempt at murder are on record for the period 1911 to August 1914, and a number of conspiracy cases which resulted in the imprisonment of some of the leaders of the Bengal revolutionaries. But they were far from being weakened by repression, and as soon as the War broke out they gathered their strength to avail of the opportunity thus presented.

(ii) *International Plots* (1914-15)

The conspiracy went ahead and the crisis deepened for the British power in India. The revolutionaries had a report—it was correct too—that the British authorities had no more than ten thousand men at that time to hold India. If but the foreign powers would help them with armament, the revolutionaries could surely win an easy victory, they could possibly do it even without arms if the Indian element in the Army would rebel or just join the revolutionaries in a concerted upheaval. The tasks thus conceived were: (1) to seduce the Indian section of the forces posted in India and Burma; (2) to throw into the country the *Ghadr* element of the Punjabi revolutionaries who began to return to India for the purpose; (3) to effectively carry out the Indo-German plot for shipment of German arms for Indian revolutionaries, particularly those of Bengal; and (4) lastly, to co-ordinate activities of the societies in India to some extent, enlarge membership of each, train them, equip them, and necessarily finance them and defend them from all enemies by terrorist means as necessary.

Terroristic activities at the hour (1914-16) have to be seen in the context of this wider attempt for an upheaval planned over the three continents. The Indian Independence Committee of Berlin was in co-operation with the German Command (the leading spirit among the Indians being the brilliant Virendra Chattopadhyay and the undaunted Dr. Bhupendranath Datta of the Jugantar fame) who kept their contact with India through the German Consuls of Washington, Shanghai, Bangkok and Batavia. These German officers were in contact with Indian agents and emissaries of the revolutionaries. Among them were the San Francisco Indians, and agents from India; Narendra Bhattacharya (M. N. Roy) and Bholanath Chanda who represented the Bengal revolutionaries; Raja Mahendra Pratap, M. Obaidullah Sindhi and M. Baraktullah who represented the exiles. The upheaval was planned to take place on 21 February 1915.

Rasbihari Bose and Jatindranath Mukherji ('Bagha Jatin') are two of the towering figures of this phase of revolutionary history; the former was to plan for the defection of the Indian forces while Jatin remained in the field in Calcutta. Even as the War began Jatin Mukherji's leadership had brought the Jugantar groups together, and the Anushilan, though independent, agreed to and actively co-operated for the upheaval. Emissaries were sent, and Indian troops seemed to be affected in many stations in Northern India and specially in Burma. But as the plot failed—the ships missed connection in the Indian Ocean—the troops were also betrayed by informers; the emissaries and the leading figures with their associates in the forces were caught and executed. Rasbihari was hotly pursued by the police and escaped to Japan. Jatin Mukherji from his hiding in Calcutta continued to wait for the arrival of foreign arms and to defend the organisation with the arms and means available here. By a clever ruse at the very beginning of the War, on 26 August 1914, a consignment of (fifty in all) Mauser pistols, imported by Messrs. Rodda

& Co., had been seized by the revolutionaries and these pistols were promptly distributed all over Bengal and came to play a crucial role in the period. A number of daring taxi-cab dacoities in Calcutta in 1915 was committed under Jatin Mukherji's direct leadership and they were a record in courage and planning. Calcutta, however, had become too hot for him, and he had to take refuge in Balasore. There, surrounded by the police force, Jatin died a martyr's death along with one of his companions, Chittapriya, fighting to the last (9 September 1915). He has remained the idolized 'Hero' of the Jugantar. The mantle of leading the united forces then fell on Jadugopal Mukherji, who had personally little taste for terrorism in general. All attempts to procure foreign arms had been checkmated by 1916, and attempts at upheaval had led to disaster.

### (iii) *Hit and Run*

A sort of "hit and run" tactics could alone be played under the circumstances. That was played in 1916-17 with increasing courage—the toll of official life was heavy, and it reached its climax when Basantakumar Chatterjee, the Deputy Superintendent of Police, C.I.D., was shot dead in Bhowanipur (30 June 1916). An intense period of repression led to the dispersal of the revolutionaries and societies were about to be immobilized. Armed duels with the police and the revolutionaries in the underground, however, were there to fill the people in general with admiration. In one of them for example, at Kalta Bazar, Dacca, died Nalini Bagchi of the Anushilan, to the last a brave and honoured patriot. But large numbers of suspected men were by then put into jail under Regulation III of 1818 or interned in villages under the Defence of India Act of 1915. The year 1917 was also crowded with events, but it was evident that the revolutionaries were too weak to organise an upheaval any longer. An intense phase of activity drew to a close with the end of the War in 1918. It had made the name of the Bengal revolutionaries famous for courage, moral character,



patriotic self-sacrifice. That reputation could never be dimmed by any propaganda of the Government or by the counsels of the wise and the liberal leaders. It had also meant the end of a chapter for the revolutionaries, for certain ideas and codes of puritanic conduct were to change from after this period.

(iv) *Some Features*

The initiation of the early revolutionaries by Aurobinda, for example, was marked by religious vows and rituals. The Anushilan prescribed a more elaborate process, vows being imposed on trainees, stage after stage. The literature common to all groups was generally the *Gita*, at time the *Chandi*, and martyrs welcomed death reciting the *Gita* with its assurance of the immortality of the soul, and crying *Bande Mataram*. Next to the *Gita*, came the Bengali lives of Mazzini, Garibaldi, the literature on secret societies, on military sciences and arts, as also the writings of Aurobinda and Vivekananda and economic studies like Sakharam Ganes Deuskar's *Deshar Katha*. A strict puritanic code of morality, celibacy etc. were enjoined, and its breach severely punished. The Vivekananda ideal of *Seva Dharma* and volunteer service (*Srimath Ardhodaya Yoga* of 1906), relief work, nursing organisation etc. were undertaken with a missionary zeal and devotion, and because of such activities the individual revolutionary became an idol of his people for humanitarian work and solid capacity for organisation. No wonder that many of them felt a sincere inclination towards joining the Ramakrishna Mission, and, still less to wonder that the best idealists among the youths of Bengal, specially in East Bengal, felt as they came in contact with the revolutionaries that the revolutionary way was the noblest way to fulfilment.

IV. *The Third Phase: Revolutionaries in and outside the Congress movement (1921-29)*

The Rowlatt Bill played a notable role in unleashing a chain of events in the First Post-War era that led to India's

adoption of direct action and mass struggle as the recognised means of attaining freedom—just the things the absence of which had made the adoption of revolutionary terrorism as a means of struggle inevitable to the despairing nationalists about two decades ago. The first and important link in the chain was the Rowlatt Report of 1919 which summed up the activities of the revolutionaries upto 1917, and suggested changes in law to crush the revolutionary movement by drastic repressive measures. But the people of India rose to a man to resist the Bill and indirectly proved that they not only would not allow the revolutionary activists to be crushed but rather seek to emulate them by “direct action” in so far as they, a disarmed people, were capable of such action. The policy of “maximum sacrifice by a few” to evoke at least “minimum sacrifice by the many” was evidently bearing some fruit.

#### (i) *Trial of Non-violence*

As the Congress launched a mass movement in 1921, the revolutionaries too had to recognise and examine its potentialities. Between 1917-20, they had been in suppression and the cadres had been in detention. As they came out, they gathered round Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das. He appealed to them to give Non-violent Non-cooperation a trial and join the National Congress for that purpose. While the Jugantar revolutionaries agreed to it in deference to Das's appeal, the Anushilan held aloof and sought to reorganize themselves afresh, and in opposition to the Congress policy they brought out the *Hak-Katha*, a periodic leaflet. Terrorist action, however, was not yet on their cards. The revolutionaries inside the Congress made the Congress and its volunteer movement in Bengal a mighty force, and they saw in *Satyagraha* (since 1921) a new and honourable way of harnessing the forces of freedom. Things came to upset them and their plan: Gandhiji's suspension of the movement at Bardoli (Feb. 1922) made them think of reorganising themselves again with a new crop of youngmen for a

revolutionary upheaval in due course. So, new groups began to come into existence from about the time, notably the Chittagong Group which was to be led by Surya Sen. A Dacca group in that University town of East Bengal was founded by Hemchandra Ghosh and later came to be divided into two halves, the Sri Sangha and the Bengal Volunteers. Both the Chittagong and Dacca groups were connected with the Jugantar. The second cause of the new trend was the impatient urgings of some of these groups to launch terrorist action early in 1923; for, as they held, finance had to be found and enemies had to be punished. The matter came to a head with Gopinath Saha's attempt (8 January 1924) to kill Charles Tegart, the hated Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, which resulted unfortunately in the murder of an innocent European. Gopinath died like a martyr, and now the press of Bengal and even the Serajgunj session of the Provincial Conference paid him openly the martyr's tribute. Of course, Gandhiji took exception to the resolution of the Conference and its wordings were later sought to be changed. But the fact remained that the people no longer feared to acclaim the 'terrorists' publicly as they had done in the pre-Non-cooperation days. Before however other revolutionary groups had decided for any open action, these incidents were taken advantage of by Lord Lytton's Government in Bengal. An Ordinance was promulgated in October 1924 and everyone suspected of any revolutionary proclivity was again clapped into jail. The foremost among them was Subhaschandra Bose, who along with some Jugantar leaders was shut in the Mandalay Jail. Acts of terrorism did not stop immediately, but the 'lawless law' had again proved effective for the time being.

(ii) *The all-India Scene*

A more significant part was played in the politics of India as a whole in the post-Non-cooperation period by a revolutionary organisation outside Bengal, in U. P. There the old links were revived by Jogesh Chatterjee of the Anushilan Samiti from Bengal. In 1925, the U.P. body

christened itself as Revolutionary Republican Party (*a la* the Irish Republican Army), which was to be re-christened later as Hindusthan Republican Association with branches from South Calcutta to Lahore. Still later in the thirties, it called itself the Hindusthan Socialist Republican Association reflecting the change in political ideas of the times. The U.P. however was shaken up, in 1927 at any rate, by the proud record of three of its martyrs, Ram Prasad 'Bismil', Ashfuqullah and Rohan Lal, the three Kakori dacoity prisoners, who did for U.P. what Kshudiram and Kanai and Satyen had done about 20 years ago for Bengal, or what the Punjab rebels, Jatindranath Das (1929), Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, and Rajguru (1931) did for the whole of the Congress. This U.P. organisation, more than the Bengal organisations with their longer record, was thus successful in affecting the climate of political opinion in Northern India after 1927, and in the next period of the national struggle, 1930-34. Chandra Sekhar Azad who fell fighting in Allahabad (1934) and Bhagat Singh (1931) had to be openly accorded honour by the Congress leadership though they had no word of admiration for the scores of Bengali heroes. Bengali public opinion could not touch the 'leaders', for Bengal unlike the U.P. was distant and 'different'.

#### V. *Fourth Phase: The Armed Wing of the Freedom Movement (1930-34)*

Repression had won again in 1924-1928 but only to lose more heavily as the later events showed. For, the revolutionary terrorists, whether within or outside the Congress, were no longer isolated from the nationalist movement as a whole. Whatever the all-India Congress leaders might think, the country had come to own them as the armed wing of its freedom movement. In jail (1924-28) moreover, the Bengal revolutionaries succeeded in forging a unity in 1925 through the efforts of Jadugopal Mukherji and others, and agreed on a common programme of patient preparation

and national upheaval. Experience had taught the veterans patience and the need of careful preparations. But younger people were impatient by their nature and would not listen to words of caution for long.

(i) *From Defeat to Victory* (1928-30)

The revolutionary leaders of Bengal were released in the middle of 1928, and found themselves at once called upon to mobilize public opinion against the Simon Commission. Pandit Jawaharlal and Pandit Motilal had returned from the visit to Moscow with a larger vision and intenser dislike of the Imperialist system. At the Madras Congress (Dec. 1927) the resolution for Complete Independence was easily carried—this was something on which the revolutionaries might congratulate the Congressmen. The Independence League was formed and in Bengal revolutionaries were organising it. But the battle was not yet over. Calcutta was to hold the next session of the Congress in December 1928. It would show if the revolutionaries had really succeeded in converting the Congress leaders to their ideal of independence. The Congress Volunteer Corps for the session was organised by the revolutionaries as a semi-military body, perhaps to serve the same purpose as the Irish Republican Army did in Ireland in the twenties. Subhaschandra Bose was the leader of the united revolutionaries and the G.O.C. of the Volunteer Corps. At Calcutta the older leaders under Mahatma Gandhi postponed, however, the confirmation of the Madras decision for Purna Swaraj by one year. The opposition to Gandhiji was led by Subhaschandra and the phalanx of Indian revolutionaries, Bengali and non-Bengali alike. Evidently the Congress decision to wait a year more was a disillusionment for many. An internal crisis was soon to develop as well. The jail alliance between Anushilan and Jugantar ended in a breach in 1929, it was never healed again. The younger revolutionaries also broke away from both the older organisations and the Revolt Group, or the Advanced Group

as they styled themselves, decided at the Rangpur Conference in 1929 for early and simultaneous rising in some districts of Bengal. Many of these 'Revolt' leaders were arrested however before long in connection with the find of bombs at a house at Mechhua Bazar Street, Calcutta. But the country as a whole was moving ahead. In Lahore, the Congress at last unequivocally accepted complete independence as the goal. The 26th January 1930 saw the India-wide celebration of the first Independence Day and on 6 April 1930 Gandhiji started on the heroic march to Dandi. The high tide of the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930 then set in.

(ii) *The Armed Wing in Action (1930-34)*

True to their promise, the Chittagong Group of revolutionaries led on 18 April 1930 (the date was chosen in memory of the Easter Rising, 1915, of Ireland) their raid on the local armoury which was captured by surprise. In daring and discipline, as well as in planning and subsequent attempts—the fight at the Jalalabad Hill on 22 April 1930, at Kalarpol on 6 May, at Chandannagar on 28 June—the Chittagong revolutionaries set an example which no one could ignore. The Congressmen plunged into Civil Disobedience and embittered by the brutal and at times beastly character of the repression that the police launched on unarmed men and women and the revolutionaries, infuriated with the police tyranny, and challenged by the boldness and success of their Chittagong compatriots, people were moved deeply by the new stirring events.

While the mass movement proceeded on the line of Civil Disobedience, the Jugantar revolutionaries planned side by side a fullfledged campaign of terrorism and guerilla activity in Calcutta and the districts. The Anushilan would wait and prepare for a general rising, but were carried off soon by their cadres to plan elaborate actions. After the fourth phase was initiated by the Chittagong raid, came another unsuccessful attempt on the life of Sir Charles

Tegart (25 August 1930) at Dalhousie Square. It was the most vehement period of campaign so far seen, in which the Chittagong Group and the B.V. of Dacca and Midnapore took the lead. It ended with the attempt at Lebong, Darjeeling, on 8 March 1934, on the life of the Governor of Bengal, Sir John Anderson. In between, there is a record of murders of district officials (of Midnapur and other places), and attempts at murder of Europeans, of Indians who were considered hostile, attempts at raids for funds, raids on European Clubs in Chittagong, fights directly with the police,—etc. etc. which were unprecedented in intensity and extension. Some of the last “heroes” of the terrorist circles were produced at this hour. Topping all was of course the modest man ‘Masterda’, Surya Sen of Chittagong. Next came a band of youngmen and women who vied with one another, almost like the Suicide Squad of an army,—(Miss) Pritilata Wadedar of Chittagong, Benoy Bose, Dinesh Gupta etc. of Dacca. The roll of honour would include a dozen names; hundreds who were equally daring and determined were sent to Port Blair in the Andamans; thousands languished in detention camps and jails without trial. The country as a whole groaned under the avalanche of imperialist repression. Without going into these details we can note a few of the more important features of this fourth phase from 1930 to 1934.

First, the times were significantly changed, and the revolutionaries were changing along with the times in their outlook. The national and international situations had become things of growing concern to the revolutionaries. The Irish parallel of the earlier phase—a secretly trained army—increasingly gave place to the ideals of mass revolution. Soviet Russia was undoubtedly a source of inspiration in the matter, though the philosophy of class war and social revolution were not yet clearly understood. ‘Socialism’ came to mean a culmination of democracy and embodiment of social justice, and began to be accepted as the goal of free India. Not that all were advancing evenly. *Inquilab*

*Zindabad*, and not *Bande Matarum*, was the slogan of the Upper Indian revolutionaries, Bhagat Singh and Batukeswar Datta, as they threw a bomb into the Legislative Assembly in Delhi (1929). But Bengal revolutionaries went to gallows with the old cry of *Bande Matarum* on their lips and had uptill then no enthusiasm for the Meerut Communists.

Second, the method of organisation had become secular now, though the old moral standards were still valued very high. The biggest innovation was of course the admission of women, particularly young girls, into the revolutionary ranks. In every respect, from killing and martyrdom to organisation and underground work, the Bengali women set examples which would be hard to beat in the revolutionary annals of any country. Undoubtedly it had another aspect; for, the abnormal politics and the strains of secrecy ennobled as well as disbalanced their adherents, men and women alike, in certain respects.

Third, the period began with the valiant raid on the Chittagong Armoury and was marked by similar brave attempts, e.g. the fight at Jalalabad, at Dhalghat, at the Pahartali European Institute (1932), at Gahira (1933), at Gaivala (1934, where Surya Sen was finally captured), and other places where the fight was straight and direct. But the revolutionaries were forced more and more to undertake again acts of individual terrorisation by murdering the British district officers or high officials (e.g. Loman, Simpson, Garlie, Stevens, Burge etc). Evidently the movement could not reach, the revolutionaries again felt, the higher stage to effect a capture of any point of power or regional dissolution of power or attain the stage of an upheaval. It was increasingly realized by 1935 that the way to mass movement and upheaval could not be reached through such acts of isolated terrorism and secret societies.

Fourth, the phase of terrorism failed, repression thoroughgoing and intense again succeeded, and communalism, considered to be an imperialist creation, had even come to



divide the nation. To all this however, the revolutionaries in their anxious search for a solution found no answer. The authorities had handled about 2500 men and dozens of women too in this period in different jails and concentration camps, and about 400 prisoners from all over India were imprisoned at Port Blair. This very fact helped them in the search for an answer. A distinct swing to Socialism and Marxism was evident among these prisoners by 1935 in the Bengal jails or camps. So, when the revolutionaries were released from the Bengal jails in 1937-38 (in the case of Andaman prisoners it was 1946), there remained almost no one to revert to the old terrorist path. The larger number thought that the mass awakening was a fact, and it called for new approaches and new methods. Many directly desired to take to the proletarian path. The nationalist veterans tried to hold together their loyal cadres within the old organisational bond, but did not know how actually to shape them in the changing times. So in 1938 the Jugantar was formally dissolved; a small core of it, however, continued to act together as Congressmen under the leadership of Surendramohan Ghosh. The Anushilan cadres met and came to be transformed into the R.S.P. with a distinct 'socialistic' programme. The Dacca groups gathered round Subhas Bose and accepted his ideology. Terrorism with all the groups was a thing of the past. The nation, they held, had accepted their ideal of complete independence as goal; and popular upheaval, which they had hoped to bring about by self-sacrifice, was in the offing.

### *VI In Retrospect*

Looking back, one must admit that Revolutionary Terrorism as a course of action full of daring and danger was no casual phenomenon nor futile attempt of blind hatred. The best elements of the country subscribed to this course for thirty long years. It was not, as was held by some officials, due to "unemployment" of the educated *bhadraloks*; nor, as was pointed out by more subtle researchers,

due to some psychological maladjustment of the youthful individuals that would yield to psycho-analytic therapy. In fact, like the Indian struggle for freedom of which it was a part and parcel, revolutionary terrorism was an expression of the national situation and also of its unresolved social and religious contradictions. No doubt during the thirty years of its life (1904-34), it failed *at every phase* to attain its end. But so failed the Indian nationalist movement itself during all the years—in 1905, in 1921-22, in 1930-33, and in 1942. Repression had won outwardly every time. But, terrorism also emerged out of every such period of suppression a stronger force with a bigger moral and popular appeal—until it found that the real objects of the revolutionary movement had been gained one after another, for example, acceptance of Complete Independence as the goal of the Indian nation in 1930, creation of the conditions for a revolutionary mass movement by 1935, and finally, defection of the Indian forces in 1945-46 that had been visualised in 1914.

It must be said that revolutionary terrorism had failed in only one vital matter. It could not enlist active Muslim support. It failed to resolve the religio-social conflicts of the Indian life and the Bengali life as a part of it, and to evoke the courage, patriotism and dynamism of our Muslim countrymen in the cause of freedom. That of course is the failure it shared with Indian Nationalism as a whole; and it is a failure the roots of which lay deep in our past. Apart from this, revolutionary terrorism succeeded in what it intended to do—evoking by the maximum sacrifice of a chosen few the “spirit of minimum sacrifice on the part of the many”. And the heritage it has left is in the main rich and noble. It is the call for living a dedicated life—self-sacrifice for national freedom, spirit of service for the needy and the poor, and regard for certain fundamental moral values—courage and discipline and devotion to duty, a seriousness in outlook, and a healthy scorn for publicity and political exhibitionism.

## 18

### POETRY

*Sashi Bhushan Das Gupta*

The renaissance of the nineteenth century brought with it a reorientation in Bengali poetry and the new phase is characterised as Modern Bengali Poetry which dates practically from the forties of the last century. Bharatchandra of the mid-eighteenth century may aptly be taken to be the last representative of mediaeval Bengali poetry where gods and goddesses cast their shadow irresistibly on the men and women on earth who are vouchsafed no opportunity to be significant by themselves. In the poetry of Bharatchandra, however, there are convincing indications that loyalty to the divinities was rather conventional and that the intrigues of the divine powers evoke more human interest than reverence. This was surely a modern tendency which found full play in the poetry of the mid-nineteenth century. Between Bharatchandra whose poetic activities ceased by the third quarter of the eighteenth century and Iswar Gupta of the second quarter of the nineteenth century there seems to be a big gap, and this gap may be explained by the fact that Western conquest, both political and cultural, took some time to shed its somewhat alien traits and inspire fresh poetic creation in the disturbed soil; on the other hand, the nation seems to have been roused from her traditional forms of art by the changed conditions of life which demanded more healthy expression through the development of a powerful prose-style.

The gap, however, which could not be a vacuum, was filled up by a heterogeneous class of minor poets, known as *Kaviwalas* or poetasters. These minor poets were mostly illiterate or half-literate people, both rural and urban, who with their inborn genius composed songs and sang them before an audience which could not be expected to be an assembly of cultured people of refined taste and temperament. Verses composed by these poets do not therefore always convey fine shades of feeling, neither was the language they used suited for that; the whole effort was something like a poetico-musical entertainment for the common man on religious or otherwise festive occasions. The verse of this period, as we have hinted above, was, as was natural, of a heterogeneous nature comprising *Kavi*-songs, *Tappa*-songs, *Panchalis* which dealt both with the episodes pertaining to popular gods and goddesses and with secular love. *Kavi*-song, which seems to have been the most important, was in fact a free and extempore wit-combat between two opposing parties, who would go on putting questions to each other and answering them in verses which were composed and set to tune extempore. Though there is no gain-saying the fact that some songs composed by this heterogeneous class of poets are praiseworthy for the flash of sentiment, the condensed and spontaneous presentation, and the excitement they could sometimes produce through the cleverness of quick repartees and the clash of witticism, they could not claim to be poetry of high order with artistic finish or fineness of sentiment. These songs served as a heritage to Iswar Gupta who for the first time collected a number of them and published them with some critical appreciation. A most striking feature of the songs composed by the *Kaviwalas* is that there are a fair number of poems which are unconventionally secular as love lyrics. This heralded, in however imperfect a form, the beginning of a new phase of our poetry with immense future possibility.

Iswar Gupta of the second quarter of the nineteenth century occupies an important place in the history of

modern poetry, though we have to confess frankly that his importance is more historical than intrinsic. On the one hand he was the successor of our late mediaeval poetry with all his fondness for alliteration and punning and a coarseness and scurrility which he obviously inherited from the *Kaviwalas* whom he appreciated; but modern tendencies may easily be detected in him by a scrutiny of the themes he preferred for his poetical compositions both serious and satirical, and these themes speak of an alert social consciousness which found itself at a cross-road in the changing conditions of a transitional period. On the one hand he may be described as a conservative inasmuch as he spared no occasion to express his unfriendly and at times uncharitable reaction against the thinking and doing of a newly evolving anglicized society; and this reaction may be said to be the mainspring of much of the satire and banter of his poems. But on the other hand at times there seems to be something like an anticipation of modern realism, in whatever crude form may it be, in the choice of typically topical subjects delineated in all their details. Iswar Gupta was popular in his time no less as a journalist than as a poet and his poems naturally share the merits and demerits of journalism; the contemporary popularity of his poems is therefore no sure index to their intrinsic value. The patriotism in his poems may be noted as a special feature, novel and fresh in tone, which widened their appeal. Another fact that contributes to the historical importance assigned to Iswar Gupta is that he was the central figure of a literary society which he succeeded in organising mainly through his journal *Sambad Prabhakar*; most of the would-be talents—either poets or prose writers—including Rangalal Banerjee, Madhusudan Datta, Bankimchandra Chatterjee clustered round him and served their literary apprenticeship in the *Sambad Prabhakar* under direct patronage from Iswar Gupta.

Rangalal Banerjee had begun his literary career by the second quarter of the nineteenth century as a stray writer of

poems and essays, but he soon developed into the writer of a number of long narrative poems where he may claim credit as a pioneer, if not as an artist of a high order. He composed four such narrative poems: (i) *Padmini Upakhyān* which deals with the story of Padmini, whose beauty chanced to be the cause of a great strife as it enamoured Alauddin Khilji, emperor of Delhi; (ii) *Karmadevi* and (iii) *Sura-sundari*, both of which are taken from the history of the Rajputs; and (iv) *Kanchi-kaveri* which has for its theme an old legend growing round a queen of Orissa. These narrative poems of Rangalal are characterised by a bardic tone and are animated and elevated by a sincere spirit of newly born patriotism. This spirit of patriotism was the motive-force, as we shall presently see, of almost all the narrative poems and semi-epics or rather literary epics that were written during the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century; and we have no hesitation in saying that it was this spirit of patriotism that inspired Rangalal to search for heroic episodes in the annals of our country. Rangalal seems to have been well acquainted with both Sanskrit and English and his poems bear evidence of the influence of both literatures in delineation and expression.

The urge for patriotic heroic poetry may be interpreted as an index to the growth and development of our nationalism in the mid-nineteenth century. As poetical works of this type were inspired by nationalism, they at the same time inspired nationalism immensely in their turn. The poets had no definite political consciousness—they speak of no political goal to be achieved; but a tremendous urge for the national uplift must have worked deeply in their sub-conscious, as is amply testified by the way in which they chose their themes and handled them. A study of the heterogeneous narrative poems composed during this period shows clearly that, whatever might be the themes chosen by the poets, they had to be substantially transformed to be adjusted to the prevailing conditions and the hopes and

aspirations of the nation. This transformation or adjustment helped the poets to a great extent in making old and retold themes acceptable and attractive to the readers of the nineteenth century.

The most outstanding poet of the period was Madhusudan Datta, who by his meteoric rise (to use his own phrase) was a surprise even to his friends and contemporaries. He revelled in diving deep into Western literature and culture, and this was not all in vain, for he succeeded in enriching his own literature with the help of the gems he could gather. Madhusudan was a typical product of Western education of the mid-nineteenth century; he may be taken to be the best representative of Young Bengal with all its bright and dark sides. On the bright side, Young Bengal made the best use of Western education in having their mental horizon widened and in being inspired to build up a new ideal of life in keeping with the progressive achievements in science and letters. On the dark side, they practically got intoxicated with Westernism and could ill digest the novelty of anglicism which surcharged the environment. Perhaps Madhusudan was a bit too enthusiastic and took a bigger dose than was healthy and for this he had to pay the penalty throughout the whole of his life. He was unquestionably a great genius—but unfortunately a wild genius—a man of immense promise but of insatiable and unguarded ambition. As for his literary equipment, he studied something of Bengali and Sanskrit, but he seems to have been in his element with Western classics in English, Latin, Greek, and even Hebrew, French, German and Italian. His first literary venture was in English, but he soon recovered from his illusion with repentance and apology and began to wield his pen in Bengali with the firm conviction that he was destined to rise or fall with his compositions in Bengali. The tenure of Madhusudan's career as an active writer in Bengali was incredibly short in comparison with his achievement; the two years indeed, 1861 and 1862 may be taken to be the most fruitful years of his

literary activity and the fact will be borne out by a few lines from a letter of his own to one of his most intimate friends, Rajnarayan Basu: "Here you are, old boy, a Tragedy, a volume of Odes, and one half of a real Epic poem! All in the course of one year; and that year only half old! If I deserve credit for nothing else, you must allow that I am, at least, an industrious dog.....You may take my word for it, friend Raj, that I shall come out like a tremendous comet and no mistake".

Madhusudan began his literary career as a dramatist, but he established his reputation as a poet. He wrote two epics, a volume of poetic epistles (*Virangana-kavya*) after the heroic epistles of Ovid, a long love-lyric (*Brajangana-kavya*) on the Radha-Krishna theme, and a good number of sonnets after the Italian type. He was a pioneer in most of his attempts with some originality in style and treatment, but his reputation rests primarily on his epic work *Meghnad-badh kavya* and also on some of the lyrical sonnets where one finds sincere outpourings of a really poetic soul.

In his *Meghnad-badh kavya*, which was the first attempt at an epic in Bengali in the Western sense of the term, Madhusudan derived his inspiration partly from the national epics of India—we mean the Ramayana and Mahabharata—but more from the works of Homer, Virgil, Tasso, Dante; and, last but not least, from Milton, whom Madhusudan always eulogised as 'divine'. To poetic technique the most epoch-making contribution of Madhusudan was the introduction of the blank verse built closely on the model of Milton. He became painfully conscious of the monotony of the much-used *payar* metre and the time-honoured custom of riming, which were like fetters restraining artificially the free movement of the spirit of poesy. The introduction of blank verse in Bengali was thus stimulated no doubt by a spirit of revolt, but some inspiration, we think, came also from the demand of a heroic age—the



age that marked the awakening of our national consciousness. The introduction of blank verse was thus immensely significant; it went a great way in rousing us from our poetic slumber and had far-reaching effects on poetry and drama.

As we have said, the mid-nineteenth century was the age of the awakening of our national consciousness; it naturally brought in its wake a spirit of revolt against foreign subjugation and an urge for political freedom and general resurgence. The urge may not have been felt strongly by the masses, but it was keenly felt by a band of poets and other writers who, with their receptive minds and prophetic imaginations, could anticipate things to come. Rangalal, Madhusudan, Hemchandra Banerjee and Nabinchandra Sen were practically the harbingers of this new heroic era of nationalism and they were substantially supported by the contemporary novelists, dramatists and essayists. So far as the themes of the epics or other narrative poems of this period were concerned, the poets fell back upon either the heroic episodes from the annals of the country or episodes from the national epics of India, or from the Puranas.

Rangalal, we have seen, drew freely from the annals and episodes of the past. Madhusudan's favourite subject was the story of the valiant fight of Meghnad (or Indrajit), son of Ravan, who fell in defence of his homeland Lanka (Ceylon) at the hands of Lakshmana through a low and dastardly intrigue to which the 'Scoundrel Bibhishan' (as Madhusudan referred to him in disdain) was a party. The *Vritra-samhar kavya*, which is the representative work of Hemchandra, was a poetic elaboration of the Puranic tradition of the killing of the demon Vritra by the gods, who were once sadly defeated and driven away from heaven, their homeland; the most appealing scene in the whole of the theme has been supplied by the story of the self-sacrifice of the sage Dadhichi with whose bone a bolt was made to kill the demon. Nabinchandra Sen's *Palasir Yuddha* (the Battle of Plassey), a ballad-cum-narrative

poem, forceful even in its emotional diction, made a considerable stir as it commemorated the last combined attempt of the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal to defend their mother land against the British intriguers. His trilogy, viz. *Raibatak, Kurukshetra and Prabhas*, is apparently based on the life-history of Krishna as described in the Mahabharata and some of the Puranas; but the real aim of the poet was to put before the people of Bengal the lofty and ennobling ideal of Srikrishna the 'divine man'—perfect in his wisdom, valour and vision, but tenderest in love and sympathy—whose special mission was to create a 'Great India' (Mahabharata) out of the chaos of the then shattered political life, full of religious controversy and animosity and social iniquities.

The novels and dramas of the period breathe the same spirit. The patriotism and freedom-mindedness of the men of letters of this period including poets, novelists, dramatist and essayists revealed themselves in two ways: first in the choice of themes, secondly in the reorientation of the whole theme to conform to the demands of the age. It may also be remembered in this connection that the renaissance of Bengal of the nineteenth century was characterised by two striking features—rationalism and humanism; and the poets were admirably prompt in giving concrete shape to the ideas that emerged out of social evolution.

Hemchandra made his appearance in the field of Bengali poetry as an ardent admirer and follower of Madhusudan; but though his theme was perhaps better chosen for the epic purpose, he could not rival the glory of his master because of his unimpressive prosaic diction and an inherent lack of poetic fervour. Nabinchandra had more imagination and a more poetic rhythm, but he often suffered from a lack of the sense of propriety; there is vigour in his descriptions, thrill in the emotional rhapsodies, but they are not always sufficient compensation for his indiscipline and

excess. He knew how to sally forth like a gushing mountain-stream, but not where and how to stop or restrain the course.

Western influence on the poets of the mid-nineteenth century was an evident reality. It played no negligible role in fostering the spirit of rationalism and humanism of which we are proud. We have spoken of the Western influence on Madhusudan who confessed with pride that three-fourths of his writings were Greek, and who warmly acclaimed Milton as divine. Rangalal confessed that he studied English assiduously and tried to compose Bengali verse in that 'pure mould'. The influence of English romantic poetry in general was palpable at places in the compositions of the Bengali poets of this period. Scientific theories also prompted some of the poets to remodel the classical or Puranic episodes on a scientific basis. The scientific spirit coupled with the positivistic and utilitarian philosophy was indirectly responsible for a rapid decline of the wonder and awe with which the mediaeval gods and goddesses had been regarded, and the most promising feature of the poetry of the period was that a tendency became manifest to define divinity in terms of humanity.

The epics and quasi-epic narratives of the poets discussed above supplied an incentive to about a hundred imitators to compose poems on the same pattern, but none of them can claim any noteworthy success. Lyrical poetry was however plentiful during the mid-nineteenth century. Though heroic sentiment was predominant and the epic and the narrative forms were popular, the lyrical tendency flowed side by side like an under-current. The epic and narrative poems of Madhusudan and Nabinchandra betray in places a leaning towards lyricism. But apart from that fact Madhusudan proved himself to be also a lyric poet of eminence by the out-pouring of his heart through some of his exquisite sonnets. Some of the patriotic poems of

Hemchandra had a bardic touch and provoked much enthusiasm among the literate people. His nature poems sounded a new note no doubt, but they suffered more often than not from an excess of didacticism. Nabin Sen did not compose very many short lyrical poems, but we shall not, we hope, be far wide of the mark if we presume that his long narrative poems are at places strings of dilated lyrics linked together through the narrative bond.

The most noteworthy writer however who strikes us as essentially a lyric poet was Biharilal Chakravarty, who, in spite of his innumerable defects, has to be recognised as a lyricist of subtlety and delicacy with pronounced romantic yearnings ultimately deepening to mysticism. He was the first romantic lyric poet of the nineteenth century, but he does not satisfy one as much by the literary finish of his poetry as he does by occasional flashes or suggestiveness. There are flights in lines and stanzas, but the total effect is rather dull and confused. A romantic note of return to nature characterises his earlier poems, but his love of nature and love of man acquired a deeper significance with the maturity of his poetic mind. There was the intuitive realisation of a great power underlying the cosmic process including nature and man, and in that power beauty, love and knowledge harmoniously blended themselves in a unity of vision. This eternal self-manifesting power of infinite attributes—attributes of beauty, love and knowledge—was realised by the poet in moments of his poetic ecstasy to the Muse of Poems—*Sarada* as the poet fondly called her. The whole of life and nature first attracted the poet with an irresistible strangeness whose meaning was hidden in vagueness; but the unity of vision cleared the mist and the unique realisation of *Sarada* as the all-embracing Power, manifesting herself in beauty, love and knowledge, added new meaning to the experiences of the poet.

Biharilal was not a poet of great artistic finish; his historical importance has been significantly described by some of

his early admirers as that of the 'Morning Bird' heralding the advent of the rising sun and hinting thereby the coming of the Poet Tagore. It is sometimes customary to speak of Biharilal as the preceptor of Poet Tagore; the supposition seems to be a bit wide of the mark; what we may be justified in saying is that Biharilal, by his lyrical exuberance of the romantic type often verging upon mysticism, anticipated Tagore and there are striking similarities in the mental set-up of the two poets in intuition and ideology.

Bengali poetry has reached the summit of its glory through the lifelong contributions of Rabindranath Tagore who represents practically a century of Bengali poetry—for even after his physical death he is still a living force with our modern poets. Among his senior contemporaries, Surendranath Majumdar deserves mention for his poetic conception of womanhood and also for the way in which he has glorified the 'eternal she' in his poems. Debendranath Sen won admiration from a limited circle for some of his exquisite sonnets. Govinda Das, a village-poet of East Bengal, struck a small group of admirers by his unsophisticated boldness in expressing the passion in love that never excludes or undermines fierce attachment to the body. But the advent of Tagore was really a phenomenon in the literal sense of the term. His life as a poet has a special significance in view of the fact that artistic creation was with him a lifelong spiritual endeavour resulting in continual self-realisation through self-creation. He was inspired to his music, he said repeatedly, through the vibrations he received in the strings of his heart from the cosmic music of the eternal universal process in and through which the Primordial Poet has been continually realising Himself by all activities of self-manifestation. The cosmic rhythm marks the endless attempt of the Infinite to define itself in terms of the finite and the Infinite comes close to the finite so as to need its love and co-operation for self-realisation. This inherent idea of the poet helped him immensely in bridging the gulf between the physical and the spiritual. Because of this idea of unity

the poet could seldom distinguish between the poet and the spiritual aspirer in himself, and his lifelong intuition excluded the possibility of any separation between the two.

The whole nation is fortunate in the fact that Tagore was vouchsafed a long life, almost every single moment of which was properly and fruitfully utilised, and even a span of life comprising full eighty years seems to be a bit short because of the fact that Tagore never ceased to grow, and as a matter of fact never stopped composing poems until his death.

From the historical point of view, Tagore seems to be the last important representative of Indian thought and culture. He was one of the worthiest inheritors of a rich legacy of literary and cultural heritage, enormously enriched by continual acquisition, through assimilation and skilful reproduction. Tagore was no doubt an extraordinary genius with inexplicable inborn poetic powers; but the whole of his lifelong endeavour will testify to another important truth: that genius is not wholly born—something of it is made by the man himself. If we are to analyse roughly the elements of his mental structure, we see, first, that he was from the very prime of his youth steeped in Upanishadic ideas of which he found a living embodiment in his father; he drew from Sanskrit literature as a sapling draws from the soil where it grows; mediaeval Bengali literature played no mean part in nourishing his receptive mind; *Sant* literature of mediaeval Hindi poetry and similar unsophisticated outpourings of the heart in the *Baul* songs of rural Bengal had a special charm for him; over and above all these his intimate acquaintance with Western literature, thought and culture from a very early stage of the development of his poetic mind was a never-failing source of dynamic inspiration. Powers and resources, inherited and accumulated, combined together to generate in him a tremendous force that is responsible for an almost fabulous literary output comprising thousands of lyric poems, hundreds of songs, a dozen novels, volumes of short stories,

nearly three dozen plays and playlets ( including dramatic-poems); and a mass of prose essays, articles, addresses and treatises. But though it is true that few other writers have wielded a pen so equally in poetry and prose or set their hands to so many branches of art—including literature, music and painting—essentially Tagore was a poet, and he himself made it clear on different occasions that all his activities were parts of one great poem for which his whole life was planned. There may appear to be different aspects in the life of Tagore, a philosopher, an educationist, a patriot and a versatile genius in literary art; but a deeper insight will bring home to us that poetic inspiration and a creative instinct supplied the dynamic force behind all the patterns of his creation in every sphere of life.

To foreigners Tagore is famous as the poet of the *Gitanjali* which earned for him the Nobel Prize and world-recognition. Those who are acquainted with Tagore through some of his poems in translation generally know him and admire him as a poet of exquisite devotional lyrics, often with a mystic trend, often with biblical simplicity and flavour. Others know him as a poet of fine sentiments but always ethereal in flights of imagination or transcendental in outlook. It has sometimes been a charge against him from the modern point of view that he could seldom view man and his world as significant in themselves; to him they have their significance always as symbols of some invisible underlying truth. Without brushing aside such charges as absolutely impertinent, we beg to add that allegations of this type owe their origin more to a preconceived notion about the poetic attitude of Tagore and to ignorance about the extent and variety of his poems than to a comprehensive study of his poems and proper assessment of them all. Let us not forget the fact that in spite of being the poet of the mystic devotional lyrics, Tagore composed the largest number of patriotic songs and poems in Bengali, and the fact that he composed a large number of poems and songs, sufficient to immortalise a poet, on love in which no chord

of the human heart has been left untouched; his ballad poems, didactic poems, juvenile poems and even nursery poems and rhymes are not things to be lost in the woods. As there are poems simple in style but intense in emotional depth, so there are poems highly metaphysical in ideas, yet quite enjoyable for their intrinsic poetic value rushing out in their spontaneity with the choicest similes and metaphors. There are poems which may be cited as illustrative of the magic of metaphor having nothing in them studied or strained.

Tagore's poetry deserves careful study also for the metrical experiments he carried out from the beginning to the end of his poetic career. He has handled all the varieties that were handled by the old and mediaeval poets and with the touch of his inventive and resourceful genius could infuse new vigour, charm and freshness into the stereotyped patterns. He could catch the spirit of blank verse and use it easily. His varied experiments with the free verse form and the diction of prose-poetry were no pastime of a master-magician in prosody; some of the best poems of the later period of his life are composed in prose-poetry rhythms.

It is not and could not be true that Bengali poetry has only a Tagore to boast of during the period composing the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Tagore had a large number of senior and junior contemporaries, everyone of whom cannot today attract our notice from behind the shadow of the Titanic man. We have already spoken of some of his senior contemporaries. Akshaykumar Baral was a poet of limited output; some of his elegiac poems deserved a mark. Dwijendralal Ray's reputation as a dramatist has overshadowed his worth as a poet and a composer of songs; but as a contemporary of Tagore he was a poet of a distinct mental set-up with a style of his own. His humorous poems certainly deserve more than a passing remark. Of the poetesses of the period, Girindramohini Dasi, Kamini Ray and



Mankumari Devi deserve respectful mention. Some of their poems are sure to last long because of the sincerity of sentiment and the spontaneity of expression.

The junior contemporaries of Rabindranath Tagore are for all practical purposes poets of the twentieth century and there is no scope for dealing with any one of them separately. Speaking of the poetry of these junior contemporaries in a very general way we may say that the main current was undoubtedly and naturally dominated by Rabindranath, though many of the poets deserve special recognition because of some important individual traits; but a cross-current of anti-transcendentalism and anti-romanticism is palpable in the poems of a few poets, who, though well-read in Tagore, were not completely overpowered by his faith and the poetic traditions that grew round him. They seem to have developed a different mental set-up because of some changed objective conditions in which they lived and thought and had their being. If we conveniently divide the Bengali poets (other than Tagore) of the twentieth century into several schools, we may speak first of a school of poets who are more or less influenced by the ideology and poetic traditions growing round Tagore, though of course, each of them possesses some noteworthy distinctive feature. There is again a second school of neo-romantics who would prefer to enjoy and express life and the world for all that they are without trying to impose any transcendental value on them. They are not always anti-romantics as they often profess to be; they rather harmonise their romantic attitude with the trends and tendencies of the age and in this they are helped by their unconventional expressions which are skilfully chosen from the ordinary life and things around. There is a third school of poets directly influenced by the post-war poetry of Europe available mainly through the medium of English. They are powerful poets no doubt and they are not without great achievements; but their inspiration and energy seem to have been spent more on their conscious

efforts at experiment than on composing poems with confidence and conviction. Of late there has grown another school of poets directly or indirectly influenced by Marxist philosophy with the conviction, or sometimes with the slogan, that an artist, be he a poet or a painter or a musician or anything else, is as much a responsible representative of the social unit as a soldier in the army is and a pen has to be wielded exactly in the same way and for the same purpose as a gunner on the battle-field uses his gun. They believe that an artist has to contribute to the advancement of social evolution exactly in the same way as the toiling masses in the factory and the field have to do.

Bengali poetry of the last two decades has been mainly the poetry of experiments; if the leaning towards new philosophies of life and the tendency to experiment have given rise to pseudo-poets of stunts and slogans, the field is not left barren; all efforts and experiments may not have been fruitful to the extent of producing any such towering personality as Tagore, yet we are proud of the harvest gathered and hopeful of future possibilities.

# 19

## DRAMA

*Sachin Sen Gupta*

Bipinchandra Pal has left for us a legacy in the form of a book entitled *Memories of My Life and Times*. Here we get not only a detailed account of his eventful and chequered life, but also a masterly exposition of the Great Renaissance that released the forces of re-creation and inspired the Bengalis with new aspirations. Very few of our writers could have given us a better picture of men and matters and ideas that contributed to the making of Bengal as we find her today. Bipinchandra was born a rebel and a rebel to his very bones. But he had a rational approach to objects for a correct appraisal of the values of individuals and their institutions. Social and cultural institutions must have, he upheld, only one objective in view: the florescence of man in an atmosphere of absolute freedom.

Freedom, he maintained, is indivisible, and man ever invincible. Needless to say that it is the quintessence of Indian culture. He was himself saturated with its fragrance. And he gave it out whenever he spoke and wrote. His writings and speeches on Arts and Letters were no less precious than his political writings and speeches. He was as much a literary figure as he was a political leader. His orations had a magical effect on his listeners, but they were logical from beginning to end. In his foreword to the first volume of his *Memories* he wrote:

The individual and his society are like the warp and woof of the social fabric. To truly understand the individual we must see him in and through his social settings; and to correctly appraise social values we must see Society in and through the life and aspirations, the struggles and achievements of its individual units.

I have picked out the above lines with a purpose. I propose to start my thesis on Bengali Drama by letting my readers know how Bipinchandra Pal had appraised its value. I felt that the above lines could give us an idea of the proper angle from which drama should be reviewed, and the kind of a measure-rod to be used.

The writer of a drama is an individual social being; and the theatre is an individual social unit. Both are co-related to one another and to society. The script of a drama alone does not make drama. Neither its performance, by itself, is drama. A drama-script is a dramatic expression of the experiences of an individual artist, its author. When it is played before an audience by a group of artists it no longer continues to be an art of a lone individual, but gets transformed into an art of a group of artists. But even that is not enough for the making of drama. There inevitably stands a third party whose responses determine drama. And this third party is the audience, the cross section of society itself.

Every individual member of an audience has an experience that, unknown to himself, constantly seeks an outlet for expression. When a writer of a drama-script does anticipate, by his experiences, the nature of the experiences burning holes in the bosoms of his audience for expression—and when the performers of the play-script are able to project the author's experiences and get them so contacted with the experiences of most of the individual members of an audience as to make them feel that what they have been suffering from or longing for had at last found an expres-

sion, it is then, and only then, that a drama is said to be born.

A script must have a form and vehicles to facilitate its projection and to help its immediate contact with the senses of its auditors. Poetry, powerful and consequential dialogues, beauty of expression, wonder and a logical denouement have been found to be effective vehicles to establish an immediate contact. That is why a drama-script must be literary in content.

Performers have been given freedom to re-create the creation of a dramatist, not because they have been accepted to be superior bodies, but because of the ability of their art to make their projections irresistible. Techniques and technicians have also been given wider berths. But all these are mere contrivances designed to create drama.

Bharat gave a pre-eminent place to *rasas* in the making of drama. These *rasas* are emotional experiences. They cannot be seen, but may be enjoyed by those who are in thirst for them. Where are such thirsty persons to be found? Surely among the audiences. He framed his laws keeping in his view the churning of emotions that would produce *rasas* suitable to satisfy the parched soul. How to ascertain that parched souls were soothed? Surely not by the help of forms and contents and the principles and the laws, but by a taste of the *rasas* and also by virtue of the mirror of the society, the theatre, that reflects living images of them.

Here we get what is known as the social significance of drama. This is the supreme test. Bipinchandra Pal applied this test while he evaluated Bengali Drama and Theatre. He wrote:

In the early years of the seventies of the last century before Surendranath and Anandamohan had organised their new platform, it was the Bengali stage which had found expression to the new

spirit of patriotism among our rising generation of educated intellectuals. It was this stage that first proclaimed the gospel of the religion of the motherland in an opera, now completely forgotten, called 'Bharat Mata' or Mother India. I forget the details of the play, but the name indicates the nature of the theme and the religious idealisation which must have inspired it. Those were the days when a new passion for freedom, personal, social, and political had possessed the educated Bengalee mind.

*Bharat-mata* was not the earliest Bengali drama. Nevertheless, it was the first literary composition in Bengali language which attempted to portray the motherland as the parent-mother of every individual child of the soil. It was composed by Kiranchandra Bandyopadhyay and performed in 1873, before Bankim had given us *Bande Mataram*. It contained a song which enraptured even our generation of patriotic workers after we were initiated by Bankim's *Bande Mataram* hymn in the early years of the present century. This song began as follows:

মলিন মুখ চন্দ্রমা ভারত তোমারি  
রাত্রি দিবা ঝরিছে লোচন বারি।

Bipinchandra rendered the above into English thus:

O India, gloomy is thy face, beautiful  
that was as the moon;  
Day and night tears flow from thy eyes.

Although he had feelingly written on *Bharat-mata* he did not lose sight of the other social factors while he discussed the role of our drama and theatre. Below I give a few more lines from him. They read:

And in those early days consciousness of sacerdotal and social bondage was far keener than the

consciousness of political bondage. And therefore our earlier dramas were all social dramas written in support of widow re-marriage and in condemnation of polygamy of the higher classes of Bengali Hindus, particularly the Brahmins.

Starting from 1852 upto 1872, the year of the foundation of the first public theatre, a ceaseless flow of dramas had come from the pens of Jogendra Gupta, Ramnarayan Tarkalankar, Kaliprasanna Sinha, Umacharan Chattopadhyay, Umeshchandra Mitra, Michael Madhusudan Datta, Dinabandhu Mitra and others. These plays were not all written on social problems but also on other aspects of our national life. The first Bengali tragedy, *Krishnakumari Natak*, was written by Michael Madhusudan Datta in 1861. Dinabandhu Mitra wrote *Neela Darpanam Natakam* in 1860 and *Sadhabar Ekadashi* in 1866; while Madhusudan contributed *Ekei-kee bole Savyata* and *Buro Shaliker Ghare Roan* and also *Padmavati* in 1860. Ramnarayan's social plays as well as his renderings from Sanskrit dramas came one after the other since 1854. Plays known as Comedies of Manners and Comedies of Errors were not wanting. Farces too were not rare. A Shakespeare play was first introduced as an adaptation, and not as a translation, in 1853. It was *Bhanumati-chittabilas*, an adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice* by Harachandra Ghosh. It was followed by Satyendranath Tagore's *Sushila Beer Sinha Natak*, an adaptation of *Cymbeline*, in 1868. The first rendering from Sanskrit drama, *Avijnan Sakuntala Natak*, came from Nandakumar Roy in 1855. The first play based on historical fable, *Krishna Kumari*, came from Madhusudan in 1861; and Monomohan Bose introduced the first mythological play, *Ramavishek Natak*, in 1867.

The spate of plays prior to 1872 was surprising indeed. The silt it had deposited had been so rich that the growth of a National Theatre followed at once. While we sit on judgement over the merits of the plays that appeared before 1872, we must not forget the following facts:

- (i) That Bengali prose virtually got a literary shape at the hands of Vidyasagar only between 1847-69.
- (ii) That no suitable verse-form was available to be used as a vehicle of drama till the appearance of Madhusudan's *Padmavati* in 1860.
- (iii) That *Bangadarsan* was not founded until 1872; and Bankim had not come out with flying colours before that. None of his major novels were written before 1872, and neither any of his famous essays and compositions.
- (iv) That the Indian Association was founded in 1876; and the Indian National Congress in 1885.

Bipinchandra Pal took all these into consideration and concluded Chapter XII of his *Memories*, captioned 'New State and National Songs,' by this declaration:

These new national songs were very popular at that time amongst the youthful intellectuals of our people. And they contributed as much as the Bangadarshan and the new Bengalee stage to the birth and early development of our new nationalism.

I feel this remark, though extremely liberal and fairly correct, does not give to a serious student of drama a satisfactory account of our dramatic endeavours, prior to the appearance of *Bangadarsan* and the over-whelming influence of Bankim on our literary ventures. I have given above a list of plays and the names of their writers who came to the field of drama before the *Bangadarsan* and the National Theatre were founded. I have also placed certain historical facts to stress the need for a re-assessment of values of dramas written and performed before 1872. Whatever may be their draw-backs and deficiencies, were they really inferior to other forms of contemporary literature? If so, what were those superior ones? Were



languages and contents of the latter really richer ? Was their social significance of greater importance ? Unless these questions are answered with illustrations, one may maintain that linguistically and spiritually Bengali dramas written before 1872 were mostly ahead of other forms of Bengali literature prevalent then, and their social significance was more remarkable than that of the other forms of our literature created then.

I have taken 1872 as a milestone, because both the *Bangadarsan* and the National Theatre were founded that very same year. With the foundation of the National Theatre (the first venture of professionalism) by the enthusiasts of the Baghbazar Dramatic Association, the leadership of the drama movement of Bengal passed from the grasp of the aristocracy to the professionals. Both Dinabandhu and Madhusudan died in 1873. Girishchandra Ghosh, till then an actor only, had stayed away from the National Theatre at the initial stage, but was subsequently persuaded to play for it, at least on one occasion. This broke the ice that had gathered between him and his colleagues at the Baghbazar Dramatic Association. And gradually the mantle of leadership fell on him.

From his plays, numbering sixty-one in all, a student of drama may infer how his mind had probably worked while he had been thinking of putting Bengali Theatre on a sound footing. As the author of *Chaitanya Leela*, he must have lent his mind to the dramatic activities of Chaitanya Dev in the sixteenth century when he had carried drama to temple yards and village greens and market places and public thorough-fares; and by doing so gave the people a taste of the divine love. Songs and dances and sweet recitals were vehicles of his drama. The village auditors, mostly unlettered, reacted to it so rapturously that they, without their knowing, used to swell the cast of the play, and to improvise lines to heighten its tension and emotional nuances. Girish took his lessons from this national tradition of Bengali Drama, and infused some of its items into

what he had received from the West. He was very little influenced by his predecessors, Madhusudan and Dinabandhu, although he had acquired his fame as an actor of exceptional eminence by representing several principal roles of their plays. Even Bankim's irresistible style had very little impact on him.

While he turned the pages of Shakespeare and Moliere, he did not allow himself to be drifted off the moorings of the tradition of Bengali drama. He borrowed from the West but did not bury the past. He nationalised Western patterns. He had no ready-made verse for his use as Shakespeare had Marlowe's. He built up one by himself to suit his purpose. Bengali prose language too had, as I have already mentioned, got a literary shape only a few years earlier than his debut at the hands of Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, during the years 1847-69. It was as ornamented as was Michael's blank verse. For his proposed dialogues Girish had to introduce many spoken words and phrases and idioms from the lips of the citizens of Calcutta, particularly of the northern part of it. He was faced by an uphill task which no ordinary writer could have fulfilled. But he proved himself equal to it. Poetry and song and dance and the message of divine love introduced in drama by Girish to keep the tradition of Bengali drama intact made it national, though not entirely of pure Indian origin. But the themes and forms and contents of his plays gained such a popularity that not only the citizens of Calcutta got crazy over his drama, but dwellers in district towns and Bengalis outside Bengal came to consider it a great privilege to be able to witness the performance of a Bengali play. Calcutta Theatres were frequently invited to visit towns in Bihar, Orissa, Assam and U. P. Their audiences used to respond with enthusiasm. And wherever they went, they succeeded in creating a love for drama. Theatre-houses were built on their travel trails in Cuttack, Balasore, Dhubri, Gauhati, Manipur, Patna, Bhagalpur, Banaras, Allahabad, Kanpur, Delhi, Meerut and Simla by Bengalis living in those places.

This extra-territorial expansion of the Bengali Drama and Theatre was a feat indeed. It provided opportunities for an intra-provincial exchange of drama. But for the bold drive that Girish gave and for his discovery of the medium of drama meeting the demand of the nation then, Bengali Drama and Theatre could have hardly made such a quick conquest of hearts of the people in so little a space of time. Girish wrote his first play *Anande Raho* in 1882 and his last one, *Griha Luxmi*, in 1909 which he could not complete due to his passing away. Before Girish had started writing his dramas, all the novels of Bankim and his patriotic writings were out (1865-85). They had tremendously moved all who could read, and had power and inclination to buy books. Bengali Theatre could not afford to keep its door shut against them. Girish and Amritalal, who might be called his second in command, put into drama some of the novels of Bankim. Thus the unlettered section of the city and its suburbs, and of the country-side also, got a taste of Bankim's novels through the theatre.

Bankim's novels were idealism made easy by an infusion of Western romance. They were more Tolstoian than those of Scott with whom he is often unjustly compared. He had a message to give. Girish too was an idealist and had a message to represent. He was no romanticist in the sense that Bankim was. He was a believer in the final fulfilment of man through the grace of God, and not by a rational juxtaposition of the society alone. It is because of this belief in him that most of his social plays have bypassed society and made the individuals, his characters, not only pre-eminent but also surrendering to their fates in a state of resignation. We call it passive, but Girish believed that it was a preparatory state of mind to receive the light. His patriotic plays like Bankim's similar novels aroused tremendous enthusiasm in the people. His *Prafulla*, *Balidan*, and *Shasti-ki-Shanti* were no less popular and rich in social content.

Amritalal Bose was as powerful an actor as he was a master of a powerful pen. He wrote thirtytwo plays for the

professional theatres. He started writing for the stage in 1875. His last play came from him in 1938. His satires and farces and skits on social and political events were irresistible, but not so his serious ventures. Play-goers, then, were crazy about them. He was the most efficient theatre-manager in his days, and a beloved social figure. He was a representative Bengali and the language and imageries and phrases and the proverbs he used for his plays came not from books but from the lips of the people amongst whom he was born and brought up. His satirical and farcical comedies were well-weaved and had a commendable compactness. *Chorer upar Batpari*, *Dismiss*, *Chatujjey Banrujey*, *Tazzab Byapar*, *Rajabahadur*, *Babu*, *Kripaner Dhan*, *Avatar*, *Khas Dakhal*, *Byapika Bidaya* came from him in quick succession, and were acclaimed by the old and the young alike. Most of them were inspired by Moliere's work, if not actual adaptations. But all of them were absolutely nationalised in expression and in form.

Upendranath Das gave rude shocks to the administrators in 1874 and 1875 by writing *Sarat Sarojini* and *Surendra Binodini*. These two, and their predecessors, *Gajadananda* and *Hanuman Charita*, created history by rousing a feeling to resist administrative excesses and molestation of women by power-crazy petty officers and outrages on the sanctity of Indian womanhood. The administrators retaliated by the promulgation of the Dramatic Performances Act of 1876 giving the police commissioners power to stop, by order, any performance that they might consider objectionable. Amritalal and a band of gallant artists courted arrest by disregarding an order. But such resistance could not be continued for the obvious reason that the result would be a total close-down of theatres. As a compromise-formula, pre-censorship of plays by the police crept in between the warring parties. The immediate cause of this repressive measure was given out to be the obscenities of *Gajadananda*, *Sarat Sarojini*, and *Surendra Binodini*, but the root cause really rested in the cold determination of the administration to fetter the theatre which was found to be

kicking sprightly. It is a shame that the Act and the practice of pre-censorship of the plays by the police are still prevalent.

Jyotirindranath Tagore, an elder brother of Rabindranath, was another pillar of the professional theatre in Bengal. He had never associated himself with the professional theatre as a worker, but as an author he was one of its main-stays. His historical and social plays, as well as farces, were of great help to it. He had taken his cue, as he had himself admitted, not from Western or Sanskrit patterns, but from the *Jatras* although he had translated or adapted sixteen Sanskrit plays and *Julius Caesar* of Shakespeare. Although some of his original works attained enviable popularity, the language he used in them was not as homely as was Amritlal's and Girish Ghosh's. It had typical taints and textures of the language used by the Tagores of Jorasanko.

Rabindranath Tagore started writing his dramas about the same time that Girish did. A musical drama was his first venture when he was very young. Even at that tender age he had a conception of drama which none of his predecessors in Bengal had ever had. He, then, wanted that the medium of expression of a truly Indian drama should be music and dance. It is not known if he wished to introduce opera in the name of drama, or if he really believed that a drama proper should be like that. He has, however, written to say that he was inspired by an Irish ballad to compose *Balmiki-Protiva*, and had adopted some of the tunes as they were set in the original Irish. His second play, *Raja-O-Rani*, was written mostly in verse, and decidedly after the Western pattern. When he attained maturity, he realized that what he desired he could not materialise. He re-wrote the play in prose and named it *Tapati*. He had been constantly oscillating between musical and dance-drama on one end, and on the other end plays after the Western pattern. And he gave some very excellent specimens of both. The greatest dramatic creations, however, came from him when he

decided to present world-problems looked at from an Indian angle of vision. These plays from Tagore, no less than his poems, carried the message of India to the world outside it. They are casually called symbolic plays which they are not, I believe. They are imaginary plays based on experiences of reality, and quite possible to be performed without the aid of any symbolic acting. *Rakta-Karabi*, *Dakghar*, *Achalayatan*, *Muktadhara*, *Kaler Jatra* are a few of such among many others.

Tagore did not write for the professional theatre. Nor did the conductors of the theatres approach him for his plays for a pretty long time. Each was suspicious of the other's competence to deliver the goods. Tagore exhibited his own plays by organising shows whenever he could manage to do so. Educated intellectuals witnessed them with interest, thought them wonderful, but came back with an impression that what were presented to them were something else than drama. He could not establish the tradition which he had desired.

It was late in life that he came to realize that unless the public stage succeeds in convincing the playgoers of the excellence of his dramas, no tradition could be built up by them. It is perhaps the Art Theatre Ltd. and Natyacharya Sisirkumar's Natyamandir that succeeded in gaining a little of his confidence in the twenties of this Century. Since then professional theatres in Bengal have staged about a dozen of his dramas and renderings from his novels. He became so indulgent to them that he changed his lines at their request, allowed songs to be introduced in places where he himself found them quite unnecessary. He had even introduced a new character in *Griha Pravesh* when the producer of the theatre where it was played insisted on it on the plea that it would help the audience to get at the story. When his *Gora*, rendered into a drama by Nareschandra Mitra, the doyen of the Bengali Stage to-day, was presented by the Calcutta Theatre, Tagore once sat

through five long hours on his seat in the auditorium till the final curtain fell upon the play.

This late communion with the professional theatre, an extremely important event though, was of less significance than the tremendous influence of Bankim and Tagore on the Bengalis during the great Swadeshi movement launched in 1905 as a protest against the partition of Bengal planned and executed by Lord Curzon. Bankim was then, of course, not living in person. But his national hymn of *Bande Mataram*, his novels like *Anandamath* and *Devi Choudhurani* and *Sitaram*, his reflectory prose poems like *Dibas Ganana* and *Amar Durgotsab* aroused the people to a high pitch of exuberance. Tagore was himself one of the high-priests of the movement. Its tempo was raised by his odes which he wrote by dozens, and his personal appearance on the platform made him an idol even to those who could not read his literature. Girish too flared up, and set ablaze the fire of patriotism by his plays *Chhatrapati* and *Sirajdowla* and *Mirkashim*, banned one after the other. But although his concept of patriotism was not poles apart from that of Bankim and Tagore, the educated playgoers of the new generation missed in Girish what they found in the literatures of Bankim and Tagore, and gradually came to take Girish as a back number. What was this feeling due to? The reasons were:

- (i) Both Bankim and Tagore were rationalists, but Girish was predominantly a believer in the cult of *Bhakti*. And the new generation had no faith in that cult.
- (ii) Novels of Bankim and his reflectory prose-poems introduced in our literature romantic expressions and gave the language a nervous conductivity that was absent in Girish and his predecessors.
- (iii) The lyric of Tagore, though re-created by him, touched the cardiac-strings of the people who could read them or could catch their tunes.

All these were no departures from the tradition of Indian literature, but a resilience of certain remarkable qualities of the creative forms of Sanskrit literature as well as those of the earlier Bengali literature since Joydev. And it is no wonder that Bankim and Tagore had found romanticism, lyricism and a play of imagination more exacting than their rationalism while they devoted themselves to their creative ventures.

The dramatists, both contemporary to Bankim and Tagore as well as the earlier ones, tried to reflect the trials and tribulations and pretensions of the people amongst whom they lived. But Bankim and Tagore wanted to inspire people for a better life with Indian outlook. This lent a colour to the depressed minds of the reading public who had been longing for a ray of light to cheer them up.

Girish and his predecessors succeeded in bringing a cross-section of society to the theatre inspite of the differences in their social and educational status, political ideals, and consciousness of life. The chain that brought them together snapped when Bankim and Tagore created a class of intellectuals as a separate entity, although a part of the society yet apart from it.

Individuals from this splinter-body assumed the leadership of the Swadeshi Movement and the Freedom Movement, and worked as missionaries to shape the nation to what they thought would be Indian in character and composition as taught by Bankim and Tagore.

To reflect a people is not all of an art. To stimulate an urge for a redemption is also an objective of art, as Dr. Radhakrishnan says. Eric Bentley has put it as 'to teach the people to reach a verdict'. This urge for 'redemption' and move for a 'verdict' need something more than mere reflection. Bankim and Tagore brought it in their literature taking into account the traditional trends and means of expression. Their romantic stories and poems



and passionate appeals and the fascinating music of their language and an unlimited flight of imagination had a magical effect on their readers.

The unaggressive nationalism of Girish was thought to be less progressive than the aggressive Indianism launched by the Nineteenth century Renaissance, of which Bankim and Tagore were the leading legatees. The latter succeeded in carrying their readers away from the auditorium of the theatre to reading rooms and literary associations and critical debating circles.

Professional Theatre for the sake of its own existence had taken to rapid renderings of Bankim's novels and their frequent presentations because they were more eagerly sought for than Tagore's original dramas which had much less story-value and more linguistic twists. By adapting Bankim the professional theatre had retrieved its lost ground. But Tagore had, by that time, influenced the cream of the educated who never came back to the theatre either for entertainment or for enlightenment. Tagore went on giving performances of his plays before his admirers whenever and wherever it suited him. A cleavage divided into two halves the educated lovers of drama. The major part thought that the renderings from Bankim were good enough. But the adherents of Tagore, the minority group, thought them no good. Though the professional theatre managed to bring back to its auditorium the majority part of the educated by presenting renderings from Bankim and Rameshchandra Datta, those of the audiences who had acquired a taste for Puranic plays also needed to be satisfied.

Biharilal Chattopadhyay and Rajkrishna Roy had tried to meet such demands. Rajkrishna was a prolific writer. He contributed a large number of plays mostly on devotional themes, although social plays and musical ones and skits also were not a few. He over-simplified the construction of Bengali drama which the educated part of the audiences did not relish much. But his contribution was

important because it gave the *Jatra* form of dramatic performances an impetus. Owing to the impact of Theatre this traditional form of drama had suffered a set-back. But when Rajkrishna Roy's devotional plays were presented from the board of the professional theatre, a part of the audiences came to realize that, after all, the *Jatras* were not to be looked down upon. Dwindling *Jatra* parties braced up. But the educated section of the community wanted fresher expressions in drama. It is interesting to note that, throughout the period of the growth and development of the Bengali Drama and Theatre, there had been a constant difference of opinion among writers as well as auditors regarding the form and pattern of Bengali drama: the dramatists and the theatre were expected to satisfy two wings of the audiences demanding widely divergent patterns. The Theatre could hardly decide which to cultivate.

In this confused state in the affairs of theatre, there appeared two powerful playwrights in the closing years of the last century. They were Kshirodeprasad Vidyabinode and D. L. Roy. The Vidyabinode gave a verse which was almost as sweet as Tagore's and a poetry rich in imagination. His prose had a flavour of Bankim's descriptive prose. Those were what the rising generation had been demanding of the theatre then. The Vidyabinode thus satisfied them. He succeeded in inspiring his audiences by his romances from history, and by his poetic representations of mythological fables. His renderings from the Arabian Nights, particularly *Alibaba*, enraptured audiences. Romance and poetry and patriotism were the triple stays of his plays. His prose like his verse was sweet, sonorous, ornamented, and helpful to declamation, as well as simple and subtle in accordance with the demands of his themes. He did undoubtedly reflect the mental colours of the people of his age. His successes were not few but many. *Pratapaditya*, *Bhishma*, *Raghubir*, *Narayan*, *Alamgir*, *Alibaba* were his important works to be enjoyed by millions of auditors both urban and rural. There

was nothing of Girish or of the earlier Bengali dramatists about him, but much of Bankim and Tagore.

Dwijendralal Roy was a renowned poet and writer of popular songs, both deep and light, patriotic and comic. But he wrote none of his major plays in verse, excepting *Seeta* and *Sorab Rustom* which two were more in the nature of *Kavyas* than plays. His prose may be appropriately called a prose version of Shakespeare's poetry. Tremendous was its impact on the audiences. It is due to him and the artists who acted for him that the Bengali Theatre in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the present one became once again a living force. His plays, whatever defects might they have, not only breathed a genuine feeling of sustaining patriotism, but contained in abundance what is called human appeal. Although almost all his plays were written on historical themes, filial affection and love for humanity came out of them as emotionally as did come out love for the country. The songs he introduced in his plays were inspiring and ennobling. His pictorial and philosophical declamations always reminded their listeners of similar expressions of Shakespeare and Bankim. It was because of these qualities of his plays that they became irresistible and that most of them were translated into several Indian languages and were adopted as patterns to be followed. The earlier dramatists succeeded in carrying Bengali plays to Bengali audiences outside Bengal. But D. L. Roy succeeded in planting them as models before playwrights of many an Indian language. He also succeeded in creating a tradition which his followers in Bengal found hard to disregard.

I feel that a theatre cannot be called truly national unless it successfully records the state of the mental attitudes of its audiences and their material environments. Only professional theatres may know them and reflect them with all their virtues and faults. Failures and successes of plays work as seismographs to record waves that undulate society.

It is because of this that a stage is called the mirror of a nation. From mirrors we get not only images we would like to see, but also we get images that give us positive shocks. For the latter we do not blame the mirror, but we direct our attention to causes that give us images by which we are shocked. While I speak of professional theatres I do not of course take them as mere commercial concerns.

There has been, indeed, a spate of plays in our own times. They have come not by dozens but by scores. But still there is an ever increasing cry that Bengal lacks in plays as she had always lacked. Why does the cry persist? Obviously those who raise the cry do not realize that a drama of the people rises and falls with the rise and the fall of the people. Other forms of literature may be made to flourish by dropping them from an ivory tower, but not so a drama of a people and for the people. A poet or a dramatist may personally transcend a society, but poetry and drama of a nation cannot afford to do so. That is one of the reasons why Tagore could not build up a tradition of drama while Girish and Dwijendralal could do it although their literary abilities were not as high as were Tagore's.

What kind of plays may you, reasonably, expect under the present circumstances? Exactly the kind of them you are getting now. Condemn them if you will, but do not expect any better.

## 20

### THE THEATRE

(1858-1919)

*Ahindra Chowdhuri*

At the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century, the Bengali Stage had already existed more than fifty years but its achievements were still negligible. The short-lived private theatres which had come into being one after another during these years did not succeed in setting up a continuous dramatic tradition in the country, and what was more, there was no repertory of Bengali plays in existence. The close of the sixth decade of the nineteenth century, however, brought a change. The year 1857 witnessed a sudden outburst of theatrical activity in Calcutta, which not only resulted in the opening of some extremely successful private theatres but also helped in a large measure in the creation of a genuine dramatic literature in Bengali, which had been foreshadowed by a few minor pieces only before that time. The performance of an original Bengali drama, *Kulin-Kulasarvasva* by Ramnarain Tarkaratna, in the year 1856 (according to some it was staged in the first part of the month of March 1857), a play dealing with the then prevailing Kulin polygamy, was hailed in the different newspapers of the day as the great landmark of original creative drama in Bengali literature which was expected to open a new vista of original plays thus paving the way for a tradition of Bengali theatrical enterprise.

Inspired by a number of enthusiastic devotees, many amateur theatrical groups now sprang up all over the city—culminating in the establishment of the Belgachhia Theatre in 1858, which was considered as the greatest achievement of the era. This was undoubtedly the most brilliant and successful of the early theatres in Bengal. It was founded by Raja Pratapchandra Singh and his brother Babu Iswar-chandra Singh of Paikpara, who not only patronized the project with their munificence and enthusiasm but took an active part in the organization of the Theatre. The staging of the dramas was the result of the intense interest of a band of English-educated men which included a galaxy of names such as Maharaja Sir Jatindramohan Tagore, Keshab-chandra Ganguli who was the dramatic director of the organization and was styled the Garrick of the Bengali Stage for his natural histrionic talents, Gourdas Basak, and the great poet Michael Madhusudan Datta.

Ramnarain adapted *Ratnabali* in Bengali from Sanskrit for staging it at the opening ceremony of the Theatre. A beautiful permanent stage was erected in the garden-house of the Rajas at Belgachhia, where various stage-effects were introduced by the best European stage decorators available at that time in the city. An individual orchestra was composed of genuine *ragas* and *raginis* by Kshetramohan Gossain and Jadunath Paul. The performance cost the Rajas Rs. 10,000 at that time, an undreamt-of event and unimaginable too. The then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Sir Frederick Haliday, witnessed the performance with his family. Michael Madhusudan wrote a synopsis in English for the exact comprehension by the European audience of the performance. Some of the notable names associated with it who became famous later on were Priyanath Datta, Kesabchandra Ganguli, Kshetramohan Gossain and Maharaja Sir Jatindramohan Tagore who acted as the music-master of the play. We read in the *Sambad Prabha-kar* edited by the poet Iswarchandra Gupta that "The performance of *Ratnabali* on Saturday last was witnessed by

eminent men of the city, including Honourable Lieutenant Governor Sir Frederick Haliday, Mr. Hume, Dr. Gopal Chakrabarty, Raja Kali Krishna Deb Bahadur, Babus Ramgopal Ghosh and Paity Chandra Mitra, Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Pandit Ramnarain Tarkaratna and a host of European and Indian elites of the town". Iswar Gupta recommended the performance of *Ratnabali* as the best among Indian theatrical performances held so far.

The success of *Ratnabali* inspired Michael Madhusudan Datta to try his hand in writing dramas. Pandit Sibnath Sastri wrote in his memoir that Michael Madhusudan returned from Madras in the year 1856 and took up a job at the Calcutta Police Court, unknown to many of the Calcutta society men except a few of his colleagues of the Hindu College. One of his old old friends, Gourdas Basak, introduced him to the Paikpara Rajas, the founders of the Belgachhia Theatre, who requested him to write a mythological drama *Sarmistha* following the principles of the dramatic construction in the European style. It is a fact that Michael Madhusudan Datta wrote *Sarmistha* for the Belgachhia Theatre, who performed it in their own lavish way on 3 September 1859. It ran for six performances, the last performance being on 27 September 1859. The then Lieutenant Governor, Hon'ble J. P. Grant, with his retinue was present at the performance along with Munsif Amir Ali of Patna, Rajendralal Mitra and many other respectable guests. It was the last performance of the Belgachhia Theatre as it had to be closed down by the premature death of Iswarchandra Singh on 29 March 1861.

In 1860 Michael wrote consecutively two farces, namely, *Ekei Ki Bale Sabhyata* and *Buro Saliker Ghare Ron*. The first one deals with evils of drinking, then newly introduced in our society at large by the English-educated Bengali young men and the latter mercilessly deals with the hypocrisy of religious fraud and licences and various double dealings in society of which the hero is a leading participant.

They are lifelike representations of our then society and it must be admitted to the credit of our poet that the characters and the situations are never exaggerated and the taste is not vulgar. It is said that Madhusudan drew these characters from life itself. He depicted through the characters some intimately known persons of his time.

In the same year he wrote another drama, *Padmabati*, based on a Greek fable, the 'Judgement of Paris'. It is not a composition of a very high order. On the contrary many critics were of opinion that Madhusudan utterly failed in this drama, but it had one significant feature. Michael Madhusudan introduced blank verse in this drama for the first time as an experiment. He felt however that blank verse then on the mouth of the actor was not correctly delivered nor could the audience follow the new mode of versification. Madhusudan wrote one more drama but in it he did not try blank verse again. This was *Krishna Kumari*, based on the story from the annals of Rajasthan by Colonel James Todd. It is the first historical play ever attempted in the annals of Bengali drama and is the first of its kind which ended on a tragical note in spite of its classical rhetoric. In this drama Madhusudan completely adopted the Western technique of dramaturgy in our literature; it was hailed as the best of Madhusudan's dramas and is still hailed by the critics as one of the best dramas in Bengali literature. It was composed in the year 1861. So we see that in the sixth decade of the nineteenth century, Michael raised with one lever-pull the drama as a piece of literature whereas the contemporary writers were in the habit of barely narrating a story which sometime would become unbalanced fabrication.

The next stalwart who appeared on the scene was Rai Dinabandhu Mitra Bahadur, whose name and fame will remain ever green in the memory of the people of Bengal, for, he was to a certain extent instrumental in the establishment of a permanent public theatre in Bengal. In later years even



Girishchandra Ghosh, who is called the father of the Bengali Stage, while dedicating his drama *Shasti-ki-Shanti* to Dinabandhu wrote thus: "Sir, you were born to be the founder of the Bengali stage..... if your dramas were not there, those young men would not have ventured to start the National Theatre. This is why I respectfully greet you as the founder of the Bengali stage". Dinabandhu Mitra wrote the drama *Nildarpan* in the year 1860, and with its production the public theatre of Bengal first opened its door to the general public on 7 December 1872. This piece of drama raised a furore in the literature and the political field of Bengal. Dinabandhu wrote seven dramas; excepting two serious plays, they are mostly satires and farces. *Nildarpan* is the best of his work. Though he got inspiration from Michael Madhusudan Datta in composing some of his farces and satires, he had an inimitable style of his own, especially in dealing with the characters from rural Bengal. *Nildarpan* has a very chequered history with litigation, conviction and the displeasure of the British Government then ruling the country; but it had a cordial reception from the general public and the newspapers as an event of national importance.

In *Nildarpan* the characters created by the author can be clearly divided into two sections; one belonging to the higher class, that is people belonging to the high-caste society, and the other belonging to the so-called lower-caste people. They mostly comprise *ryots* and their family. The latter types created by the author are unique in every respect as also their dialogue, mannerism and behaviour. The scene was bold, clearcut and complete, chosen from the rural society of Bengal. But the higher-class types are more conventional, specially in the dialogue of high-flung literary style in which they spoke. They all seem to be stilted characters, particularly from their spoken language. However, the situations were good and the whole piece can be taken as a documentary episode of the indigo-planters' behaviour in dealing with the *ryots* of Bengal and their consequences. After *Nildarpan*,

Dinabandhu wrote *Nabin Tapaswini* in 1863 and *Bia-pagla Buro* in 1866. In the same year he wrote *Sadhabar Ekadashi*, another worth-mentioning satire of this period. In this piece Dinabandhu got inspiration from Madhusudan's *Ekei-ki bale Sabhyata* published in 1860. Another comedy, *Lilabati*, was written by the same author in 1867.

We have now surveyed the line of progress of Bengali drama, from 'Natookey' Ramnarain to Dinabandhu through Michael Madhusudan Datta. There were some minor dramatists from 1865 to 1867. Till this time Bengali dramas were developing in the line of social satire and realistic comedies, here and there with a pickup of historical or mythological themes. In 1867 Monomohan Bose, who was a famous composer of songs in *Kavi* and *halfakhari* organizations, wrote a mythological drama, *Ramavishek*, with abundance of songs mostly devotional and pathetic. This turned the whole trend of the dramatic course. The dramas before were composed on the model of Western dramaturgy and appealed mostly to the handful of educated gentry. This play roused the extensive mass of common spectators. The author wrote many mythological dramas but *Ramavishek Natak*, *Sati Natak* and *Harischandra Natak* were the most dazzling gems of his creation. He wrote two social dramas which were not so popular.

The enthusiasm for the Theatre which passed over Bengali society in the course of the seventh decade of the nineteenth century since the establishment of the Belgachhia Theatre gave birth to many more respectable amateur societies. Besides *Bidyotsahini Sabha*, a literary and theatrical club was established under the patronage of Kaliprasanna Sinha, the well-known Bengali writer. The Metropolitan Theatre, organised by the great savant and religious reformer Keshubchandra Sen, staged *Bidhaba-Bibaha Natak* in 1859. *Hamlet* and other plays were also performed by this theatre troupe. The Pathuriaghata Theatre was founded by Maharaja Jatindramohan Tagore. The Sovabazar

Theatrical Society opened with Michael's *Ekei-ki bale Sabhyata* in 1865. The chairman of the executive committee of this theatrical society was none else than the famous literateur Kaliprasanna Sinha. They also performed in 1867 Michael's historical drama *Krishnakumari*. Both the acting and the play were highly spoken of by the *Hindu Patriot*, hailing the drama as the best and the most original up to that period. Actors like Pearylal Chatterjee and Priyamadhab Basu Mullick appeared in the principal roles.

Then we come across the Jorasanko Theatre organised by Gunendranath Tagore and Jyotirindranath Tagore. Here they performed the *Naba Natak* by Pandit Ramnarain Tarkaratna in 1867. It deals with Hindu polygamy prevailing in those days. The companies were fortunate in having the famous actor Akshaykumar Majumdar, who appeared in the role of Gabesh Babu. Ardhendusekhar Mustafi was so charmed with the acting of the piece that he used to say that "It was the performance of Naba Natak that had taught him all that he had to learn, see and hear about acting". Many other theatres sprang up all over Calcutta, particularly in the major Bengali localities. One such amateur theatrical club, Baghbazar Amateur Theatre, later called Shyambazar Natyasamaj, staged *Sadhabar Ekadashi* by Dinabandhu Mitra in 1868 with notable amateur actors who afterwards became famous and giants in their line, including Girishchandra Ghosh, who appeared in the main role of Nimchand and also coached other artists in different roles. Among them were Nagendranath Banerjee, Ardhendusekhar Mustafi, Nilkamal Ganguli, Amritlal Mukherjee (Bel Babu), Radhamadhab Kar and many others. Justice Saradacharan Mitra of the Calcutta High Court wrote later on about the impression Girishchandra made upon him in that day's performance thus: "Many dramas in English, Bengali and Sanskrit I have read carefully, some are only present in my memory and some have been effaced from it, and as age far advanced now, much was lost in my

memory. But one thing I will never forget in life and that is the lifelike acting of Nimchand of that night on which Rasaraj Amritalall Bose wrote his famous couplet in Bengali after the death of Girishchandra:

মদে মত্ত পদতলে  
নিমে দত্ত রঙ্গস্থলে  
প্রথমে দেখিল বঙ্গ  
নব নট-গুরু তার (১৩১২ সাল)”

The same troupe performed Dinabandhu's *Lilabati* with great success in the month of May 1872 with Girishchandra in the leading role. The author was so pleased with the performance, specially with the superb acting of Girishchandra, that in ecstatic joy he (the author) clasped him in his bosom and said: "I was not aware that my verses could be so well read".

In the same year the door of the public theatre in Calcutta was opened for the general public. Brajendranath Banerjee wrote in his short history of the Bengali Stage about the advent of the public theatre: "from the sixties of the last century onwards we find evidence in the newspapers of a growing demand for a Bengali public theatre". The credit of this achievement belongs to a group of young men of North Calcutta or strictly speaking Baghbazar. They had already started an amateur dramatic club and were thinking of converting it into a public stage. A National Theatre was being suggested at the time. All welcomed the idea at once, with however one important exception. The exception was Girishchandra Ghosh. He argued that they had no money to equip a stage which could fitly be called the National Theatre of Bengal. It would not be fair to assume the name and sell tickets to the public. The others however were not prepared to listen to this counsel. In a fit of anger Girishchandra left the group and stood aloof. Thus the National Theatre came into being on 7 December 1872 without its leader and director. Girish ultimately

joined the Theatre in 1873 and occasionally appeared on its stage if and when opportunity permitted him to do so.

In order to exist, the public theatre of Calcutta performed the old dramas of the now-famous dramatists from Ramnarain to Monomohan Bose; then in the demand of new dramas to be performed on the stage, the authorities could not find any new dramatists to help them, although some minor dramatists with no very significant plays appeared on the scene from time to time. So they started dramatising Bankimchandra's famous novels one after another; still the ever-increasing demand for new plays could not be fulfilled by the theatres.

There were now three theatres—the National Theatre, the Bengal Theatre and the Great National Theatre, who could not build a house of their own and went on performing here and there. They staged the dramas of Jyotirindranath Tagore, who was one of the founders of the Jorasanko Amateur Theatre. His *Kinchit Jalajog*, a light piece published in 1873, was played at the Nat-Mandir of Radhakanta Deb Bahadur. The *National Paper* says in its issue of 30 April 1873: "At the last National Theatre (26th April) several farces were played. Kinchit Jalajoga was first acted on the stage. It elicited great cheers from the visitors. Other farces were also successfully acted". Jyotirindranath became a major dramatist and composed about thirty-two dramas divided into various classes, such as historical dramas, operas, farces, and translations mainly from famous Sanskrit dramas and one of Shakespeare's historical dramas (*Julius Caesar*), though most of his translated plays were never performed on any stage. He became a very popular writer on the stage by his historic-cum-romantic dramas, such as *Puruvikram Natak*, *Sarojini Natak* and *Asrumati Natak*. He put more emphasis on idealism and romanticism than on historical facts. He was very popular because of the patriotic feelings roused by his plays among the audience.

He was the first dramatist who appealed to patriotic feelings for independence and love for our people and country in songs such as:

জল্ জল্ চিতা, দ্বিগুণ, দ্বিগুণ,  
পরাণ সঁপিবে বিধবা বালা ।  
জলুক জলুক চিতার আগুন,  
জুড়াবে এখনি প্রাণের জ্বালা ।

*Sarojini Natak* was performed at the Great National Theatre in the year 1876 and a poem recited as an apology in the same year:

স্বাধীনতা-রত্নহারা, অসহায়া, অভাগা জননি !  
ধন-মান যত পর-হস্তগত  
পর শিরে শোভে তব মুকুটের মণি ।

Another historical drama from the annals of Rajasthan which depicted the last days of Rana Pratap of Mewar was performed in the Great National Theatre in the year 1880. But Jyotirindranath drew the greatest attention of the general public in his first historical drama, *Puruvikram*, performed on 3 October 1874 at the Great National Theatre, which stirred the national feelings excited by such songs as:

মিলে সবে ভারত-সন্তান, একতান মনপ্রাণ,  
গাও ভারতের যশোগান ।  
ভারত ভূমির তুল্য আছে কোন স্থান,  
কোন অঙ্গি হিমাঙ্গি সমান ।

Of course there were some lesser-known dramatists who used to write plays mainly depending on the topical incidents of the time. One such satire, *Gajadananda*, written by Upendranath Das was performed at Great National Theatre on 9 December 1876. It was written against the contemptible behaviour of Jagadendu Mukherjee, a famous *Vakil* of Calcutta High Court and a member of the Bengal Legislative

Council, who invited the then Prince of Wales (afterwards King-Emperor Edward VII) to his house and arranged a welcome by the *pardanashin* ladies of his family by blowing conchshells and doing *varan* in the Bengali Hindu style. The Government of Bengal was highly offended by the presentation of this piece on the stage and tried to prevent its repetition. On the representation of the Government of Bengal, His Excellency Lord Northbrook the Viceroy promulgated an ordinance giving emergency power to the Government of Bengal for controlling dramatic performances. Ultimately the ordinance was changed into an Act which was unanimously passed by the Legislative Council in December 1876. Many protests were lodged by eminent Indians and newspapers but none could prevent its enactment. The Dramatic Performances Act was a great blow to the vitality of the Bengali Stage. Most Bengali dramatists became shy and they never tried their pen in dramatising the bold and exciting episodes from history or from society to present them on the stage. So there was again a dearth of dramas, because of the Act passed in December 1876.

Next year, 1877, we see from the list of publications that only seven dramas were written which included Jyotirindranath Tagore's *Emon Karma ar korba na* (a farce) and Girishchandra Ghosh's two mythological curtain-raisers, *Agamani* and *Akal Bodhan*. Girishchandra wrote these pieces as a stopgap only. He expected that finer and major dramas will come later on. He then became the lessee of the Great National Theatre in the month of July 1877 and transferred to it the name 'National Theatre'. He dramatised Michael Madhusudan's *Meghnad-badh* in a new form; previously it was played in the Bengal Theatre. He also dramatised Nabinchandra Sen's *Palasir Yuddha*. These two playlets are the first steps of the great dramatist who blossomed forth in later times. Girish wrote about eighty plays in several forms including historical, mythological, social, farces, X'mas pantomime and operas. He tried every style of play writing. He also translated Shakespeare's *Macbeth* which was played

on board the Minerva Theatre on 28 January 1893. *Prafulla*, a social drama, was performed at the Star Theatre in 1899. It is still a favourite piece of the Bengali audiences and is still being played on the stage and radio. Amongst his historical plays, *Sirajudulla* was first performed at Minerva Theatre in 1905, and *Mirkasim* at the same theatre in 1906. These are the epoch-making and soul-stirring patriotic dramas which swayed Bengal in the days of Anti-Partition and Swadeshi movement. But he was superb and really great in mythological and biographical dramas of the great religious saints, such as *Chaitanya Bilap*, *Buddhadev Charit* and many others. Girishchandra after observing the masterpieces of his predecessors and the responses and reactions from the general public chose his own way in selecting themes for his plays and pursued his experiments in the evolution of his dramatic writing till the last play *Grihaluxmi* which he left incomplete at the time of his death on 9 February 1912. However, *Grihaluxmi* was completed by Debendranath Bose and was staged under the managership of his son, the great actor Surendranath Ghosh (Dani Babu) on 21 September 1912. Girishchandra touched the core of Bengali heart, its sentiment and ideas. So he was able to conquer Bengali hearts not only in Calcutta but in the small towns and villages as well. Most of his mythological and religious dramas were transformed into *Jatras* which used to tour all over the countryside. He was not realistic in treatment but was an idealist who tried his utmost to lift our countrymen through his various types of dramatic composition. Hence he was aptly called the Father of the Bengali Stage who not only created and developed the Bengali stage into a full-blooded and vigorous active organisation from its amateurish embryo but transformed it into a majestic thing with his wonderful dramatic compositions suitable for the Bengali general public for long decades.

A contemporary and colleague of Girishchandra, Amritalal Bose, who is aptly called Rasaraj, wrote plays mainly in lighter vein. He started writing his plays before Girishchandra



tried his hand in this art. Amritlal's *Hirakchurna*, a play based on the sensational Gaikowad of Baroda case of the time, was staged in 1875. He wrote more than thirty dramas mostly pantomime, burlesque, farces, comedy of manners, and a few serious plays too. But the best of his work, *Khas-Dakhal*, which is still remembered by the old playgoers, was staged at the Star Theatre in 1912. He was not only a qualified play-maker but was also a great actor and director. His meticulous care of details in the production of a play will be remembered by the old stagers and playgoers alike. He died in 1929.

There was another dramatic genius and Girishchandra's contemporary, Rajkrishna Roy, who wrote innumerable mythological pieces many of which were performed at the Bengal Theatre; *Pralhad Charitra* was the brightest jewel amongst his creations. He started writing dramas in 1875 and died in 1893.

Our great poet Rabindranath Tagore started writing plays from 1881. He wrote many dramas in his inimitable and unique style. *Raja-O-Rani* was performed on the board of the public theatre on 17 June 1890 at the Emerald Stage. Many of his dramas as well as novels were dramatised and performed in the next century. After Rabindranath, the name worth mentioning among the dramatists was Pandit Kshirodeprasad Vidyabinode whose period of drama-writing extends from 1894 to 1926. Amongst his many short plays, *Alibaba*, an operata and adaptation from the Arabian Nights, was staged at the Classic Theatre of Amarendranath Datta on 28 November 1897; it remained the evergreen piece of the theatre. Of his most popular historical dramas, *Pratapaditya* was performed at the Star Theatre on 15 August 1903. Of course he wrote many other plays.

The dramatist who drew a clear and palpable demarcation between the 19th and 20th century dramas was Dwijendral Roy, fondly called D. L. Roy. He was a great idealist, a poet who painted his imagination in a pattern of dialogue,

quite new in Bengali literature. He was already a great writer of humorous songs when he started writing plays in 1895 with the farce *Kalki Abatar*. His second comedy, *Biraha*, was staged at the Star Theatre in 1899. He wrote his first historical drama *Tarabai* in 1903, performed by the Unique Theatre on board the Bengal Theatre Pavilion in the same year. But the historical drama which created a sensation was *Rana Pratap* at the Star Theatre on 22 July 1905. *Durgadas* in 1906, *Nurjahan* and *Mebar Patan* in 1908, *Shajahan* in 1909, *Chandragupta* in 1911, all of them were performed at the Minerva Theatre. He wrote many other plays but the historical ones became most famous, specially *Shajahan* and *Chandragupta* which remain favourites even today. He died in 1913, but his style of writing and dramatic composition captured the fancy of the playgoers and also that of the budding dramatists who tried to copy his style of writing in the new plays which were staged on the various public stages after the death of Girishchandra in 1912.

There was now left no other gigantic figure as all the pioneers and contemporaries of Girishchandra had passed away before him except Natyacharya Amritlal Bose who was now in a very advanced age. Then came the demise of the great popular actor of the stage, Amarendranath Datta, in 1916. Bengali stages fell into a bad state. There were no powerful actors left to lead a theatre except Surendranath Ghosh (Dani Babu), who carried away all the laurels that he could gather from the second-rate dramas which merely smacked of imitation here and there of the great D.L. Roy. Except one giant, Dani Babu, there were other actors of reputation scattered all over the theatres but only Smt. Tara Sundari still shone in her full glory. Amritlal and Kshirodeprasad, two experienced dramatists, were still living but their pen failed to create any more masterpieces. So by the end of 1919 we see the horizon of the Theatre heavily clouded without a silver line.

## 21

### MUSIC AND SONG

*Amiya Nath Sanyal*

The period of hundred years from 1857 to 1957 may be considered in a brief retrospective survey from the point of view of the history of the renaissance in the art of Music and Song in Bengal. The century is conspicuous for giving effect to new outstanding movements in the progress of fine arts in Bengal, especially the art of pure music and song.

From a long time before the incidents of the Sepoy Mutiny, the intelligentsia of Bengal had been experiencing pleasant contacts with as well as unwholesome shocks under the influence of outlandish domination, that is to say, the Pathan and Mughal imperialism. The poets, the artists and the independent thinkers of Bengal became accustomed to note the difference between alien culture and foreign domination. The intellectual habit and a peculiarly adaptive temperament of the progressive people of Bengal went to great lengths in order to study, scrutinise and absorb the best of foreign cultures and the pre-existing fusion of Hindu and Mahomedan cultures. In the case of Bengal the political tempo of the Mutiny was not so blunt as an emotional charge associated with some abominable load used for effective manipulation of muskets. The era had much more interesting and important features to present before the vision of Bengal in the arts of music and song.

History of literature and traditional lore of Bengal gives us to understand that, from the 15th century at the latest, the poets and musical composers of Bengal made good use of the opportunities of drawing upon the resources of traditional culture of the classical music and song of North and Western India. That traditional culture was the result of the conjoint intellect and activities on the part of Hindu and Mahomedan musical artists. Radhamohan Sen (last quarter of the 18th and first quarter of the 19th century), who was versed in Sanskrit and Persian languages, wrote a book on music entitled *Sangita-taranga* (Sahitya Parishad MS, first published in 1818) in antiquated Bengali verse. The matter-of-fact style in which the narrative part deals with the anecdotes concerning Amir Khusru (contemporary of Toglak Badshah) and Gopal Naik, together with the fact that the narrative matter absolutely has nothing to do with the authentic traditions of Mia Tansen (16th century) and Akbar the Great, leads me to infer that Radhamohan Sen had merely copied from and retouched upon an unknown original writing of a writer who must have belonged to the 15th century at the latest. This unknown writer must have preceded the great renaissance of North Indian classical music which burst out in wonderful compositions of *Dhrubapada* forms and in *Alapa* forms on string instruments. Almost contemporaneous with that classical renaissance, the Vaishnava saint-musicians of Bengal licked into shape the incomparable forms and the styles of *Keertana* music at the famous conference held in Khetura. There is not the least doubt that the masters of *Keertana* art utilised many of the *raga* patterns designed by Hindu-Mahomedan traditionalists of the classical styles, though such masters refrained from utilising the structural plan consisting of *Sthayi Antara* and *Samchhari* of classical music.

Later on during the 17th and 18th centuries when the classical movement branched out in the forms of neo-classical romantic trends such as *Khyal* and *Tappa*, accepting only two of the four formal divisions of musical composition

Bengali composers such as the saint Ramprasad Sen (b. 1718) and Ramnidhi Gupta (better known as Nidhu Babu, b. 1741) came to adopt such four or three or two divisions of composition variously, according to artistic and aesthetic necessities of the Bengal style of music. Bengal of the 18th and 19th centuries had her full share of such legacies of traditional music. The will to utilise the broad base of cultural fusions and the manner of realisation of substantial results of musical art were peculiar to the genius and temperament of Bengal from early times. And it has to be granted that renaissance in art does not spring up on waste lands or uncultured soil; it requires a history of determined activities leading to some fruitful purpose. Cultural renaissance never takes into account any and every weedy growth, however exuberant such growths may be by reason of natural heat and moisture of the uncultivated soil.

The century under our purview acquaints us, at the very outset, with the personality of Dasarathi Rai, better known as Dasu Rai, who died in 1857 at the height of a glorious popularity when the art of publicity through press, poster or platform was practically unknown. This creator of a wonderful chain of compositions of Bengali ballad songs, collectively termed *Panchali Gan*, not only created history but also paved the way for the work and benefit of a host of other composers of ballad music, operatic songs and dramatic songs of his time and after. By verbal pattern and texture, Dasu Rai's songs were Bengali songs out and out. Yet, this greatest of ballad composers on mythological or legendary subjects very effectively requisitioned the traditionalised melody patterns, as also the structural plan of classical compositions. Melodies or strains such as *Lum*, *Yaman*, *Desh*, *Surat Jai-jayanti*, *Bahar*, *Sahana*, *Kanada*, *Sohini*, *Khambaj* etc. were suitably adopted by Dasu Rai. He did not adopt or even imitate modes and styles of *Keertana* compositions, which held a unique position in the sphere of religious music of Bengal from the times as early as the 17th century and were

distinguished for the excellence of composition and plasticity of music. Nor did he borrow any of the styles or forms of the *Kavi* and *Tarja* songs in order to please the folk-taste. Vulgarity or surrender to dictation was not the characteristic point with Dasu Rai in his major and noble compositions at least. Expert operatic composers of his time and after, such as for instance Krishnakamal Goswami, Rasikchandra Roy, Gopal Ure, Monomohan Basu, Rajkrishna Roy, Motilal Roy, Brajamohan Roy etc.—down to many of recent times, made good use of the style and plan of Dasu Rai's compositions. Consciously or not, composers of dramatic music followed Dasu Rai. If anybody chooses to compile a history of the music of the opera, the drama, and the ballad songs of Bengal, he will not come across a parallel example in any other country in the matter of such songs being composed in refined cultured music of North India, nor in the matter of success judged by connoisseurs and the general public. And it was Dasu Rai who created the history, as already observed. He was the original seer and creator of programme music on refined lines of the traditional art.

Side by side with Dasu Rai, we have to notice Sridhar Kathak (b. 1824), a scholar as well as a great composer and musician who must have been living and working with energy between 1860-70. His proficiency in the art of Bengal *Tappa* music, and his shrewd insight regarding histrionic possibilities of the art of *Kathakata* (i.e. specialised recitation of subjects of ancient lore dealt with in Bhagavata, Mahabharata, Ramayana and the Puranas generally), led him to compose interlude music for dissertations in *Kathaka* style. As I came to learn from my father Dr. Dinanath Sanyal, M. B., 1851-1935, (who was well acquainted with traditional informations concerning the art of Bengal *Tappa* and *Tap-Khyal* music of early eighties and also the school of Sridhar as a *Kathaka* artist), Sridhar's father and forefathers were *Pathakas* and *Kathakas* of old style; they could not present effective interludes of music inside recitations. Sridhar was a musician and composer first and a *Kathaka*

afterwards; he was also a ballad singer for some time; he was an efficient artist of Bengal *Tappa* and *Tap-Khyal* and composed charming songs in no way inferior to those composed by Nidhu Babu; Sridhar was the first of *Kathaka* artists to introduce interlude songs inside *Kathaka* programmes; finally, both prose and verse interludes of his school used to be sung in melody patterns of classical tradition, but not in the patterns obtaining with *Keertana* music or with folk music such as *Kavi-gana*, *Tarja*, *Sari*, *Bhatiali* and *Jhumur* of Bengal. Sridhar appears to have made an art of interlude music; as a matter of fact, he was popular and successful enough to hand on the method and technique of his new style of *Kathaka* art to a good number of his disciples among whom his nephew Atulyacharan Bhattacharya obtained great renown for scholarship as well as for the art of *Kathakata*. The chain of *Kathaka* artists and *Tappa* singers continued throughout the latter half of the 19th century. Interested music lovers of such Bengal art of the 20th century had opportunities of listening to the demonstration of Nagendra Bhattacharya (of Ranaghat, d. 1934), Ram Chatterji (of Gondalpara, d. 1937?) and Haripada Banerji of Nadia (d: 1941), all of them being *Kathaka* and musical artists.

This leads us to Bengal *Tappa* and *Tap-Khyal*, which together make out a quite distinctive feature of the renaissance taking place in the latter half of the 19th century. I have to recall briefly certain reminiscent statements made by great artists such as Ostad Badal Khan Saheb, Nagendranath Bhattacharya and a few others, as well as of connoisseurs who had lived long enough to recite experiences of times as early as the seventies or eighties of the last century.

Ostad Badal Khan who was born (b. 1833, d. 1936) and bred up as a traditional artist in the arid lands of the Punjab and the western states with musical atmosphere charged with shrill staccato of indigenous *Tappa* and howling outbursts of the Gwalior pattern (*Guberhar-Van*) *Dhrubapada*

and *Khyals*, was induced to come and settle in Calcutta by 1882 under the most auspicious patronage of Dulichand Seth and Shyamlal Khattri. Himself a great artist, a maker of artists, and a great connoisseur of all-round refined music as I found him to be, he used to tell me that Bengali *Tappa* and *Tap-Khyal naqsha* (forms or patterns) were so much the sweeter and artistic to hear regarding elegance and subdued richness, simply because Bengal artists avoided the use of glamorous staccato chains of flourish and created a new custom as it were of using *zamzama* chains of ligato disposition vignetted and interfused with *meerh* and other softer techniques. Evidently, Bengal artists could not like the musical juggleries and hysterical abruptness of the original Punjabi and Gwalior varieties. Temperamental craving for depth and serenity of musical expression was responsible for the evolution of the new style of *Tappa* and *Tap-Khyal* singing. Badal Khan was a sincere admirer of the Bengal style of Aghore Chakravarty. My father as well as Nagendra Bhattacharya (Ranaghat) told me that Nathu Khan Tappadar, Imam Bandi (mother of Ramzan Mia), Ramzan and Srijan Bai (all of them first rank exponents of the western style of *Tappa* forms) became converts to the Bengal style as they lived and moved in the Bengal atmosphere of music, imbibing the beauties of musical expression by mere acquaintance and experience.

Speaking about early seventies, my father told me that Mahesh Mukherji, the most talented specialist of *Tappa* and *Tap-Khyal* of those times, had gone to Gwalior to learn at first hand the techniques of Punjabi *Tappa* and Gwalior patterns of *Dhrubapada* and *Khyal*, and came back as a fulfilled artist of western *Tappa* consisting principally of songs of Shori, Hamedum and Mast-Bulbul, three greatest composers of *Tappa*. This Mahesh Ostad, as he was nick-named, turned out as a regular professional artist, and he was practically the originator of the finished style of Bengal *Tappa* and *Tap-Khyal*, though he did not compose any Bengali song.



Many other professional and amateur artists took up these new features of what we may justly call Bengal *Tappa* and *Tap-Khyal*. Among the amateurs the most famous were Aghore Chakravarty, Lalit Lahiri, Lalchand Baral and Surendranath Majumdar, all renowned for melodiousness of voice as well as for the artistry and other graces of musical expression.

My uncle Chittaranjan Bagchi, who learnt *Tappa* and *Tap-Khyal* under the tutorship of Mahesh Ostad and Nathu Khan, used to tell me that the tradition of *baithak* music i.e. exclusive soiree music of the cultured type during the last quarter of the 19th century came to mean a programme of *Dhrubapada* music invariably supplemented by the music of *Tappa* and *Tap-Khyal* forms. Such programmes were popular among connoisseurs of refined music and among music lovers who loved music for its own sake. The *baithak* music was not generally intended to be a vehicle of sectarian or religious publicity in as much as the sectarian types of songs concentrated chiefly on some message value for the attraction of interest and attention of the listeners but not on any purely artistic excellence of the music of such songs.

Such new patterns and textures of *Tappa* and *Tap-Khyal* formally required new dispositions of the rhythm and cadence of the words and sentences of the songs. Quite naturally, the experts of the art of *tabla* (i.e. the most popular and indispensable pair of drum instruments for classical or refined music) had to invent rhythm-patterns suited to the form, as well as the tempo character of the music presented by the vocalist. The most outstanding and the best of such inventions were the *Madhyamama* of slow tempo, and the Bengali *Ektala* of slow and medium tempo, and the Bengali *Ara* and *Posta* of slow tempo. These rhythm-measures were admirably suited to the spirit of the Bengal *Tappa* and *Tap-Khyal*. Incidentally, such music was mostly sung in slow tempo, less frequently in medium

tempo, and rarely in quick tempo; whereas the Punjab and Gwalior *Tappa* were characteristically sung in quick tempo, less frequently in medium tempo, but never in slow tempo, —at least according to the standard obtaining with the Bengali artists.

These two specialised products of musical renaissance appear to have sustained their typical character upto the first quarter of the 20th century. Nikunjabihari Datta, Nagendra Bhattacharya and Ram Chatterjee as seniormost exponents of the art lived upto the first quarter of the 20th century as able artists. Next to them by age, but not inferior in artistic vision and abilities, was Satischandra Chatterjee (a grandson of Mahesh Ostad) who enjoyed artist's annuity granted by Zamindar Sourindramohan Tagore. He was on the other side of seventy when I met him for the last time in 1939 at Calcutta. Next to him appeared Kalo Babu of Telenipara, and Kali Pathak of Howrah. Kali Pathak is a living exponent of the art in good and vigorous form even in his present old age.

These were but a few, and probably the best of many literate persons who contributed to the fascinating lure as well as the practical development of the specialised arts of the musical renaissance. But there were many of good reputation who were illiterate by reason of circumstance. Nadia District was proud of at least four such artists at the beginning of the 20th century. Ostad Sashi Kamar, Haridas Modak, Bakreshwar Modak and Jadu Chandal were excellent artists of *Tappa* and *Tap-Khyal*. Of them, only Sashi Kamar was a professional musician, and taught his disciples on empirical lines with only one formula viz. 'hear, listen and imitate'. The last named person was a rather vagrant artist who found listeners but no disciples. The rest found no time to teach or hand on the music to anybody.

This leads us to another feature of the renaissance which was uprising between 1860 and 1870. It concerned generally the intellectual and theoretical aspect of the art of cultured

music in Bengal of those times. Specifically it ushered in and concentrated on the practical method and elementary methodology of the art of teaching music in a way which was distinct and different from the other empirical or free-lance ways of teaching and training in classical music.

No unbiased historian of the music of Bengal may afford to ignore the ideas and activities which grew up and engrossed a small body of intelligent artists under the leadership of Zamindar Sourindramohan Tagore of Calcutta, the greatest of patrons of classical music that Bengal has produced within historical times. He spent the whole of his life and money for the cause of spread and advancement of refined classical music, and it is said that before he spent his last breath he expressed his one last desire viz. that his own *Setar* be reverently laid alongside his dead body before its last and sacred surrender to the flames of the funeral pyre.

An efficient academy was started and established by Sourindramohan and his colleagues consisting of artists of classical song and of instrumental music such as *Setar* and the *Vina*, together with a body of Sanskrit scholars who gleaned the best ideas on music from treatises written in Sanskrit. The organisation principally conducted by Ostad Kshetramohan Goswami, Sourindramohan, Ostad Lachhmi-prasad Misra (*Vinakar*) and Kalimohan Banerji, all of them practical musicians, bespoke of the first and a stable endeavour towards the cultivation of the art of the pure music of the instruments such as the *Vina*, the *Setar*, etc., and also of the standardised music of *Dhrubapada*, *Khyal*, *Tappa*, and *Tap-Khyal* forms. Within a decade, those academic workers were able to edit and publish books entitled. *Yantra-Kshetra Dipika*, *Sangita-Sara*, *Kantha-Kaumudi* and also a book of musical notations of the songs of *Geeta Govinda* written by the famous poet Jayadeva. Sourindramohan also edited the books entitled *The Six Ragas* and *The Universal History of Music* in English, and

*Gandharva-Kalpa-Vyakaranam* (published in *saṅgā* 1824, by Sasibhushan Kirtiratna at Girish Vidyaratna Press, Calcutta) in Sanskrit. His organisation was the first and foremost of its kind to constitute a code of musical notation and to publish elementary books of exemplified notation music. Sourindramohan, Kshetramohan and Kalimohan deserve the credit for making interested lovers of refined music in Bengal notation-minded and alive to the benefits of a simplified system and method of learning and teaching of such music.

This intellectual renaissance concerning classical music happened at a time when no other patrons, artists or music lovers of other provinces had dreamt of the possibilities in that direction. Of course, the traditional and familial schools of artists springing from the time of Mia Tansen and a few other masters had their simple practical methods of teaching the pure music of *raga* on instruments. But those persons kept their codes as well-guarded intellectual properties for the benefit of their own families. Only a few little bits of information that percolated out of such reservoirs of utilisable knowledge gathered in the form of loose fluid currents of empirical and unreliable knowledge and were converted into erroneous practice prevailing among freelance or outsider artists of classical music. The canonical literature written in Sanskrit on subjects of music could not be of any help to the practical artists. Such conditions of empiricism mixed with half-truths and ignorance had persisted through the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. And it was a phenomenon for Bengal as well as for India that a coterie of intelligent music-lovers took upon itself the duty of a general check-up about such matters in the latter half of the 19th century.

Considered as a whole, the combined activities of the academy started by Sourindramohan was the prime moving force of a generalised intellectual movement which began with the publishing of vernacular texts on music, effective

journals and thought-provoking articles concerning musical subjects generally, and classical music particularly, as early as the last quarter of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. The spirit of renaissance was writ large on the pages of *Gitasutra-Sara* written by Krishnadhan Banerji and of the monthly journal entitled *Sangita-Prakāsika* (edited by Jyotirindranath Tagore, published by Bharata Sangita-Samaj of Calcutta, and printed by Adi Brahma Samaj Press in Calcutta), although the author and the editor respectively chose to differ on some points from the opinion of the pioneers of the movement, and advocated new modes of notations for the classical and other songs.

Of the other trends of music and songs of Bengal only a few appeared as interesting, though unsettled, for reasons which need not be gone into. Of these the foremost in importance were *Dhrubapada* forms of Bengali songs, composed in imitation of original Hindi songs. These became prominent, not as musical patterns, but by reason of a didactic or metaphysical character of the message-contents of such songs. Originally, this sort of composition was one of the many planned activities of Raja Rammohan Roy, the giant reformer concerning monotheistic faith in Bengal. The plan was followed by Maharshi Debendranath Tagore and an elite group of reformers. It yielded only a limited crop of music upto the time of the advent of Rabindranath's music which gave a new mystical turn and spiritual character to the course of refined Bengali songs.

Rabindranath's music was a renaissance within a renaissance. The dry didactic and at times catechismal aspect of the songs of Rammohan Roy and his latter-date followers appeared to have metamorphosed into songs and music of charm and appeal by the power of a magical wand wielded by Rabindranath's genius; the introvert caterpillar was becoming an extrovert butterfly. Ultimately, Rabindranath's songs shed a new and sublime light on the field of refined music of Bengal. *Rabindra-Sangit*, the music and song of Rabindranath as termed collectively, was by technique much

simpler than the *Tappa* and *Tap-Khyal* forms. Straight and bold as the erstwhile *Dhrubapada* forms, it revealed nevertheless the essential formalism of the best of traditional patterns of the classical music of much older times. And the songs were the lightest by structure among other existing examples of refined music. A large majority of *Rabindra-Sangit* is definitely tinged with the colour of classical *ragas*. But mere parade of such colours was not the intention of Rabindranath; nor was it of any distinctive credit for him, because a host of Bengali composers had worked with success in that line before him. As literature Rabindranath's compositions appear as new dreams and visions of lyric charm and supernatant truth through the medium of wonderfully expressive words. But neither the play of *ragatints*, nor the individual literary techniques can explain the mystery or analyse the spirit which lie deep in the bosom of his songs entrapping a craving for as well as a fulfilment of Truth and Beauty, churned out of untold depths of the sea of human life. Historically considered, one might say that what was nascent in the hearts of Rammohan and Debendranath became renascent with new form and life in the soulfull outbursts of Rabindranath, the greatest of modern composers. Rammohan and such others had tried to preach and inculcate, the affair concerned the intellect only. Rabindranath went straight to the heart and its sensibilities, the phenomena concerned the aesthetic feelings or the appreciative instincts of the listeners.

Rabindranath's style of music at least gave impetus to a host of musical composers of his time and after. Setting aside the attempts of mere copyists, the spirit and form of *Rabindra-Sangit* have consciously or otherwise stimulated a few others to bring forth their original compositions, some of which are as charming and spontaneous as those of the great poet. Bengal will remember with pride and delight the compositions of Rajanikanta Sen, Atulprasad Sen, Dwijendralal Roy, and Nazrul Islam, for a long time to come.

The rise of the so-called modernism of 'modern Bangali songs' can hardly be considered as a challenge to either the classicalism underlying the refined music of Bengal or to the transcendentalism of *Rabindra-Sangit* in the sphere of soiree music. Connoisseurs and historians do not make much of kindergarten experiments or of commercialism in music. They think in terms of such designs and vision of art as not only enrapture the heart but also elevate the soul and encompass the best of the cultural outlooks in human society. Renaissance of music, as history and tradition reveal to us, carries and conserves within itself wonderful tricks and resources which enable it to persist against and outlive waves of glamorous re-barbarisation which at times sweep over spheres of musical art. The connoisseur and the composer with true vision of art know full well the truth of the remark: "to go as you please is not the way to arrive at what is pleasant".

## FINE ARTS

*Sarasi Kumar Saraswati*

The disintegration of the empire of the grand Mughals meant also a general decline of all purposeful artistic pursuits in the country. Under the aegis of the Mughal emperors the forms of art that reached their apogee were architecture and painting. The decorative scheme in architecture indicated also a high degree of plastic sense and skill. In all these forms a definite setback was perceptible during the reign of bigoted Aurangzib. With the rapid dissolution of the empire after him all powerful traditions, particularly such as depended on courtly support, languished and gradually petered out. The arts that flourished in the princely Rajput courts fared no better. The impact of the new conditions, consequent to the establishment of British paramountcy in India, stifled practically all indigenous creative pursuits out of existence.

The contact with the British led to an awakening which, however, was rather slow to appear. Bengal was naturally the first to feel the new impact, however tardy. This awakening was recognised in many spheres, including art. The great legacies of architecture and sculpture seem to have been irrevocably lost. The indigenous style in both these forms of art became extinguished, so to say, with the disappearance of the imperial fabric of the grand Mughals. Bengal had been little affected by the Mughal architectural style. Nevertheless, in her brick temples of various shapes and



designs it is possible to recognise a charmingly individual expression of the art of building. In the decorative plaques of these temples the surprisingly naive plastic sense of the Bengal artists may be found to be clearly manifest. With the approach of the materialistic and utilitarian outlook due to Western contact was spelt also the extinction of these individual styles. Neither the buildings of the Anglo-Indian style, not the copies of the Greek and Roman models which were highly prized by the aristocracy, could develop any purposeful and effective style in any of these forms of art.

It is only in painting that after the inevitable phase of general decadence Bengal may be found to have made distinctive contributions. Not only that; it may further be said that the artistic movement in Bengal in the beginning of the present century practically ushered in a new resurgence of pictorial art throughout the whole country. Indian painting in the hands of creative artists acquired new standards and new values and in certain respects anticipated much of what is called the modern movement in Indian pictorial art. The neo-Bengal movement underlies this artistic resurgence and a retrospect of the state of this art in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries may help a better understanding of the new urge.

The alien Britishers in the early days of their rule were not likely either to check the decay of indigenous artistic traditions or to initiate a new and fruitful movement for a resurgence of art. These early Britishers, the makers of the British empire in India, were men of little learning and culture whose only object was to expand the Company's trade in India and to acquire vast fortunes for themselves in the offing. They had no interest either for their own culture or for the Indian. It is true that reports of the fabulous wealth of India and the enormous income of the Company's officers attracted a large number of British artists to India. But the conditions prevailing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were not suitable for any happy commingling of ideas and modes of the two alien traditions

to prepare the ground for a new movement. Tilly Kettle arrived in India in 1769 and the news of his success induced many others of his profession to follow him. Till 1820 the flow of British artists to India was more or less continuous and regular and they worked for the Company's new nabobs and for Indian princes and nobles. After 1820 the regular flow stopped as a result evidently of the fall in the demand for British artists.

The paintings executed by the British artists in India fall into three categories. In the earliest days the fashion seems to have been for large-size oil-paintings, a mode that was entirely alien to India. The three best exponents of this mode were Tilly Kettle, Johan Zoffany and Arthur Devis, each of them amassing a vast wealth by the profession of his art. John Smart, Ozias Humphry and George Chinnery were the leaders of the art of miniature painting, particularly portraits on ivory. This mode ousted the large-sized oils from favour. The third category of British painting in India consisted of water-colour drawings either as ends in themselves, or as studies for subsequent engravings, aquatints or lithographs. William Hodges, Thomas and William Daniells and others executed in this mode a large number of views and landscapes which were highly popular in Europe.

Among the British artists who sojourned in India a few belonged to the top rank. The paintings executed by them were also certainly not small in number. It is surprising, hence, that they did not evince any Indian feeling, or produce any impact on indigenous Indian painting. The West and the East had definitely contrasting traditions of art and it is difficult to combine the two unless a mutual understanding is possible. The style and modes which the British artists brought to India were firmly established in the Western mould from which any deviation was thought to be a sacrilege. Their sense of superiority precluded, again, any receptive attitude or mood on their part so as to enable them

to know and understand the Indian modes and techniques. Later, from the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Indian artists received some training in Western techniques and styles for works under the Company's commissions. At that time indigenous traditions of art had reached one of the worst phases of decadence and the artists in their moribund state had lost the instinct and capability required for a better understanding and assimilation of an alien trend. Little could they imbibe of the new techniques and modes, much less their feeling and spirit. The result was the emergence of some bastard styles (commonly called Anglo-Indian or Indo-British) in different parts of the country, their divergences mainly depending on the differing indigenous modes. On the whole, none of these styles can be said to have much artistic merit. Their main purpose was illustration and this function they fulfil to a certain extent. In Eastern India, the Patna School of painting furnished one instance of this bastard art.

With the growth of Western education in the later half of the nineteenth century, schools of art were established in different centres for art-instruction of Indians. Presided over by European artists, the courses of instruction in such schools aimed at copying faithfully Western works of art in occidental techniques and modes. In such a method there was very little scope for originality or individuality. In fact, such qualities were often baulked at. In spite of the fine delineative skill, the paintings of the students and artists trained in this method lacked character and appeared to be shams and ineffective. No great art could be fostered by ignoring the traditions of the soil and its environments.

We may now discuss the state of the indigenous modes in Bengal in the early days of the British rule. As in architecture, the Mughal school of painting did little affect the indigenous trends in Bengal. Doubtless it is that a provincial offshoot of the Mughal school flourished at Murshidabad during the short span of the life of the newly risen Bengal Kingdom which lasted approximately for a period

of fifty years. It represents a decadent phase of the imperial Mughal school and as such was not destined to be of much aesthetic import or to exercise any great effect on the contemporary modes prevailing in Bengal. It has to be mentioned, however, in passing that this decadent Murshidabad trend lay at the root of what emerged as the Patna School of painting under the tutelage of Western mode and technique.

For a long time past Bengal had been the home of a naive and simple folk tradition in painting. The early evidences of this folk tradition are extremely scarce, no doubt because of the fragile nature of the materials on which paintings of this mode were executed. Traces of this simple tradition are found to occur in manuscript-paintings in Bengal of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and imply evidently the existence of the folk mode in still earlier periods. Broad and curving linear rhythm with a surprising capacity for rendering the volumes and masses and defining the outline, which characterised the tradition, connects it with the classical style of painting as evidenced at Ajanta, Bagh, etc. and in the manuscript-illustrations of Eastern India belonging to the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries. The folk tradition differs from the classical in the simplicity and broadness of its composition and colour scheme and in its elimination of all unnecessary details. Another characteristic of the Bengali folk mode is the emphasis on form achieved by a certain dissonance in the coloured areas. This folk mode lingered for centuries in spite of the social and political vicissitudes, which of course affect but little the common folk. Scroll painting of the rural *patuas*, at one time largely in vogue throughout Bengal, reveals the vitality of this trend till about 1900. Despite local dialects, all folk expressions are linked together by such common characteristics as are described above.

Perhaps the best known records of the Bengali folk trend are supplied by what are known as *patas* of Kalighat.

Kalighat has a special sanctity for the Hindus as one of the fiftyone sacred *pithas* associated with the worship of the goddess *Sakti*. With the growth of Calcutta as the premier city in India, the sacred *tirtha* standing in its neighbourhood rose also in importance and pilgrims came to visit the shrine in increasingly large numbers. As in all *tirthas*, the incessant flow of pilgrims created a brisk market and a number of rural *patuas* from parts of western and southern Bengal migrated with their families to Kalighat and settled in the vicinity of the sacred temple there. The vocations of these *patuas* consisted not only of picture-making, as their caste name signifies. They also made images and dolls in clay, wood and a variety of other lesser materials. Indeed, an impress of their important profession of making images and dolls may be found to be evident equally in their *patas*, characterised as they were by bold and sweeping brush strokes, defining the full and rounded plastic masses that make up the form. By a manipulation of the curves in the composition the features are chiselled, so to say, with an exquisite precision. The chief merit of this art lies in the modelling capacity of the line, amazingly fresh and spontaneous, rhythmic as well as vital. "The drawing", to quote Ajit Ghose who was the first to recognise the excellence of this tradition, "is made with one long bold sweep of the brush in which not the faintest suspicion of even a momentary indecision, not the slightest tremor, can be detected. Often the line takes in the whole figure in such a way that it defies you to say where the artist's brush first touched the paper or where it finished its work".

These are qualities that may be found to have been inherent in the entire structure of Indian artistic tradition, and in view of this long-standing heritage it is difficult to accept Archer's recently advocated theory that the school presupposes 'Anglo-Indian source'. The illustrations that Archer cites in support of the possible Anglo-Indian content in theme as well as in mode do not appear to have emanated from the Kalighat tradition. Nor is the early date attributed

to these above reasonable doubts. Archer further postulates that the later paintings show a weakening of the Anglo-Indian influences, whereas the truth seems to be the contrary. The Kalighat School seems to have begun as a pure and spontaneous expression of the indigenous folk trend and the painting in which the qualities, detailed above, are valid were seemingly the earliest. In the later phases Anglo-Indian influences naturally and inevitably made their intrusions leading to a weakening of the indigenous folk elements in the school. The decay began in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The compositions tended to become cruder and coarser, the superb draughtsmanship grew weaker, lines became broken and faltering, and, despite the introduction of the Anglo-Indian modes of shading and stippling, the figures in the later *patas* lacked that chiselled precision which characterised the earlier works. Economic reasons and changes of tastes were, no doubt, the main factors that contributed to this decline. At the same time it should also be remembered that the impact of the alien modes sapped the very foundation of this naive and simple folk trend, which became extinct early in the present century.

Kalighat paintings depict mythological themes as well as humorous skits on social and topical subjects, the latter gradually growing popular in the later phases. The themes, usually limited, were endlessly repeated, each from a type picture preserved in the family. The quality of the earlier paintings deteriorated in the later generations lacking the spontaneous dexterity and manipulative skill of their forbears.

In the general state of decline, outlined above, Kalighat paintings of the early phase provide a refreshing interlude signifying the potentiality of Bengal as the centre of an artistic urge and impulse under changed conditions at a future date. It is not surprising that about the beginning of the present century there was felt an awakening which led to the emergence of a new and fruitful artistic movement in Bengal.

The new movement started, however, with a retrograde step. E. B. Havell, a principal of the Government School of Art, Calcutta, denounced in strong terms the prevalent method of instruction in the art schools. He had a deep reverence for India's artistic heritage and dwelt on the necessity of an intimate acquaintance with the past traditions of the country and of recapturing their glories. The movement for national awareness, that was beginning to take shape in the last decade of the nineteenth century, had its tempo quickened in Bengal in the beginning of the twentieth as a result of the Swadeshi movement consequent to the unwanted partition of Bengal. Never were the times so propitious for an appeal to the country's past.

The leader of the new movement was Abanindranath Tagore, a talented colleague of Havell in the Government School of Art, Calcutta. In spite of his thorough training in the Western modes, Tagore felt the formal and realistic concept of Western art to be an obstacle to the intellectual and imaginative function of art. He delved deep into Indian artistic and literary lores to seek new ground and new lines of inspiration. His quest was not confined to India alone, but was extended far beyond, to Persia on the one hand and to Japan on the other. This versatility led him to discover his style which may be described as a fusion of the occidental and the oriental modes without any detriment to the character of Indian art tradition. This style was entirely a creation of his for the expression of his own genius and in fulfilment of his own artistic impulse. His aesthetic ideals and charming personality drew around him a small band of young artists. The Master with his direct pupils were the pioneers of the new movement.

The movement is said to have started with a retrograde step because of this studied attempt to return to the past. In the general state of chaos and disintegration, as outlined above, such a return appeared to have been called for in order to find a solid ground in the past artistic heritage of

the country, if not for anything else. The achievements of every great period of Indian art were explored and their possibilities carefully analysed. With this knowledge of the past there were experiments in diverse methods, manners and techniques. It is by such laborious processes, and guided by the genius of a master artist, that each of his pupils discovered his own distinctive metier. The work of the pioneers initiating the new movement was no slavish imitation of any one of the past styles. Each had acquired his own individuality in interpreting his imaginative conception in colour and form by following an indigenous style and traditional methods. The early phase of the new movement produced distinguished artists and the movement made great advances under their earnest and fostering care.

Abanindranath and his brother Gaganendranath were the two stalwarts, each developing his individual and distinctive style according to his own conceptions and perceptions. In the works of both we find a high idealism and technical virtuosity. The leading traits of Abanindranath's style "are an intensely romantic and lyrical quality and a dreamy and mystic treatment of his subjects which lift them to a far higher level than the plane of merely literal naturalism". The dreamy and mystic atmosphere which pervades his compositions seem to impart a certain sentimental and emotional content to his works and this might at times tend to an effect of weakness. His sure draughtsmanship however saves his works from such a destiny. He is said to have introduced the Japanese colour wash, but he modified this technique in his own way. In landscapes and portraits he also made distinct contributions. In the first he used colour in the Western mode without any detriment whatsoever to the Indian feeling and atmosphere. In portraits he devised a special mode of using oil colours which emphasised the grey and sombre tints. This he did to maintain conformity with the Indian atmosphere. His best portraits are however in pastel and in these he stood unrivalled, particularly in the matter of delineating the texture of the skin.



It is not possible to discuss within this short scope all aspects of his versatility. He was a master of many modes and trends which he successfully synthetised always with a view to impart Indian feeling to his productions.

Gaganendranath was hardly less gifted than his more famous brother. A highly talented artist, Gaganendranath's fame rests chiefly on the effect of chiaroscuro which he introduced in his works, on his experiments in cubism which he used in a new mode and with a charming effect, and on his cartoons which were lashing satires on contemporary society and topical events. He worked principally in the Western mode, but his productions did not lack the Indian warmth and feeling. The paintings in his own cubist fashion reveal a rare genius. Instead of the hard and formal aspect of European cubism, Gaganendranath's cubist works glow with a mysterious charm which he only knew how to impart.

Many were the immediate disciples of Abanindranath. The foremost and most distinguished among them is Nandalal Bose. In his works the indigenous ideals in art may be said to have been most successfully interpreted. In his early career he was engaged in copying the murals of Ajanta. This familiarity with the classical trend turned him essentially into a lover of statuesque classical form. His unerring dexterity in draughtsmanship leads him also to the classical line with its bounding curves and sinuous plasticity. He is thus the best exponent of our classical trend in art. His works, however, differ from the classical as in his interpretation of the classical he always avoids the pretty and the sentimental and emphasises the statuesque dignity and majesty of form. These may be regarded as the distinctive and outstanding qualities of his style, and in these respects he excels even his master. Along with these qualities, he combines also a decorative sense which endows his compositions with superb effect. Hardly does he use colour, but when he does he follows the traditional Indian method. Clear and explicit, he always avoids what is vapoury or

misty. In his interpretation of the classical he recreates it to which he adds a new dignity and dimension.

Asitkumar Haldar, Mukul Dey, Surendranath Kar, Kshitindranath Majumdar and a few others were also the immediate disciples of Abanindranath; each was eminent in his own distinctive sphere. In a way they appear to have been influenced more by Abanindranath's style which they maintain with slightly varying degrees of their own individual touches.

Among the modern greats, Jamini Roy is an outstanding personality. A versatile artist, he achieved success in the earlier days in the Western mode. Later, an instinctive urge led him to explore the fundamentals of Indian art concepts and develop a style, distinctively his own, drawing his inspiration from the basic concepts of the Bengali folk trend, seen at its best in Kalighat *patas* of the early nineteenth century. This he remodelled in his own manner and his style successfully integrating line and colour into a harmonious scheme which the folk artists found difficult to achieve. In developing his style he depends not only on his own interpretation of the fundamental concept of art, but explores and seeks to assimilate lessons from the other alien trends nearer to his own ideas and perception. His mastery of the Western mode enables him to assimilate the different strains into an organic composition that is itself vital as well as dynamic and rhythmic in content. The artist seems to work in his own pleasure of creation. The spectator also evinces pleasure for the freshness and spontaneity that permeate the creation. Jamini Roy succeeded with his experiments in a new mode and a new technique and may be regarded as one of the pioneers in exploring successfully the great potentialities of Indian art.

How vital the new movement was may be discerned from the surprising fact that the great poet Rabindranath suddenly emerged as a great painter when he was nearing seventy. It is possible that he might have felt the urge for

creation in the new medium of brush and colour from the sincere earnestness of the pioneers of the new movement which had its root in his own family. But his intention and ideal seem to have been different. It should also be remembered that he had no previous training in the fundamentals of pictorial technique. This, in a way, left him free of any imposed standard. A poet is an artist also, and his artistic instinct led him to explore for himself his proper avenue for the fulfilment of his new creative urge. In so doing he did not look to the past like the pioneers of the new movement. And the mode that he discovered was entirely his own. He was principally concerned with the delineation of masses and volumes in organic relationship with one another in order to create an effective form. By his distinctive genius he succeeded in doing so. Line was of little import in Rabindranath's art. Rabindranath's writing, poetry or prose, is imbued with a fine lyrical grace and it is surprising to note the complete absence of any lyric quality in his painting. This may indicate that he wanted his art to be an expression of himself as a separate personality altogether. Rabindranath depended on colour for the delineation of masses and volumes. In this respect he made new approaches different from the Western as well as the Indian modes. The Indian mode using bright colours depended on curving contours for the rendering of plastic masses. The Western artist adopts softer colours with shades and tonalities to achieve the same end. Rabindranath followed neither. The possibilities of line in this respect he failed to appreciate. Nor did he like to soften down his brilliant colours. He solved the problem in his own unique manner by the blends that he devised by various experiments with the palette. He invented colour schemes, bright and glowing in texture but without any adverse effect on the plastic shapes. In this respect he was a path-finder to be ranked with the great masters of the world. His paintings reveal a rough and rugged strength and powerful forms which are highly truthful, judged from the aesthetic standard.

The third generation of artists working in Abanindranath's style failed to reach the required standard. Their works became sentimental and insipid, and it is because of their insufficiency that the new movement has been so disparagingly criticised. The failure of the movement was due not to any lack of possibilities of the movement itself, but to the insufficiency of the successors. Of late there has been a revolt against the movement, heralded by a few young artists forming what is known as the Calcutta Group. With this revolt individualism of expression seems again to be stressed and there have been produced a number of successful works in a variety of modes. The individualists had also been groping for new modes of expression, and it is difficult to foresee what new modes will take shape. It is embarrassing again to review the recent trends without references to the artists themselves. But one should wisely desist from such references at the present stage.

## 23

### THE SHORT STORY

*Srikumar Banerjee*

The short story may be defined as a story restricted within a brief compass and written with a special technique and object in view—the delineation of a mood, a curious point of interest or a sudden crisis in human life. Its beginning is abrupt and unprefaced, and its end, though strictly deducible from the aspect of the narrative outlined in it, should ordinarily have an element of unexpectedness or a questioning note stimulating further thoughts. With due allowance for the difference of medium and technique, it should approximate, albeit in a lower key and through the help of realistic, though suggestive, details, to the impression left by a lyric.

In its modern form the short story has been a rather recent emergence in Bengali literature. It was only when the social control of the individual was relaxed and he was given a free scope to indulge in all his feelings, including his most fleeting moods and casual impulses extending to his most extravagant whims and fancies, that the short story found subject-matter of infinite diversity to build its fabric. For a brief spell in the hands of Rabindranath and Prabhatkumar it based itself upon a perfect equipoise between the claims of society and the individual, but the equilibrium was soon disturbed through human passions breaking through the old framework and creating for themselves

new orbits revolving round an egocentric axis. Love, once rigorously limited in its scope and a strictly regulated passion, now broke loose from its bonds and established itself as a ubiquitous presence, protean in its diversity and elusive and unpredictable in its nature. It began to fill the brief compass of the short story as the wind fills the sails of a vessel bound on a far and adventurous voyage. The old family bonds and immemorial traditions of life became loose and elastic and offered an opening for the most diverse human relationships. Economic life, thrown off its hinges under the shock of two world-wars and the partition of the country with all its unsettling and devastating effects, precipitated a crisis in human nature, liquidating the age-old moral conventions and reducing man to strange and desperate shifts to keep his head above water. Under this intolerable stress he developed psychological twists and perversities of so pronounced a character as to upset all our previous estimates of human nature and make us think of it almost as an unexplored region. The short story, here as elsewhere, has thriven upon the release of new forces consequent upon the rapid, almost bewildering changes in the social environment and the gradual crystallisation of new values. The realistic appraisal of every atom of human feeling, of the faintest and most inconsequent movement of the human mind, acquired a compelling interest overshadowing and very often repudiating the idealistic estimate consolidated through long centuries of man's strivings and aspirations.

The short story in the sense of a brief narrative of man's thoughts and doings written without any conscious art and incorporated in religious books for illustrating a spiritual truth or pointing a moral is a quite familiar feature in our mediaeval literature. The translation of the Puranas in Bengali made available to Bengali readers a vast wealth of stories inherited from the rich treasure-house of Sanskrit—stories in which the interest was mainly supernatural, though the familiar features of our common human life peeped out occasionally through the mists of the other

world. The Mahabharat and the Bhagabat are particularly rich in this story-element which fills up the interspaces of the doctrinal exposition and inculcations of a code of devotional ethics. It was these stories that relieved the monotony of abstract, metaphysical disquisitions and furnished the principal source of attraction to the popular mind. This interest in stories is also continued in the indigenous *Mangal Kavyas* which faithfully followed the model and literary art of the Puranas and here the element of realism is stronger as it is reflected from contemporary society. They also reveal the commendable beginnings of an effort at characterisation and humour and of the delineation of social manners which gave fruitful hints to the novel. The Vaishnava biographies also testify to the awakening of a historical sense and a new awareness of the life of the day which formed the scene of Sri Chaitanya's visionary trances and mystic communions with Divinity.

Secular literature also contributed its share to the growth of the sense of realism that culminated in novels and short stories. The tales of romantic passion originating in a somewhat exotic atmosphere but naturalised in the remote fringes of tribal Bengali life, exemplified in the writings of Alaol and the Muslim group of poets congregated in the courtly circle of Arakan, strike a new role of freedom from religious influences. The strain was followed, mingled with moving pathos, in the wilder, but more homely society depicted in the Mymensinha and East Bengal ballads. They glorify the constancy and idealism of a love, turbulent and ungovernable in its impetuous force but steadfast to its own laws, once the choice has been made out of its own free will. This love emanates from the real circumstances of a life remote from courts and camps and free from all accepted conventions but nurtured in its own rude and primitive setting with all the deep-rooted strength of a tree in rocky soil. Over and above these writings, the folk-tales, with all their miraculous happenings and faith in direct divine intervention, give us narratives well-balanced in their construction and swift-

moving towards an apt, dramatic conclusion, providing glimpses, through the thin disguise of fairies and demons, of the actual society swayed and moved by unquestionable human passions. These folk-tales, in spite of their supernatural colouring and atmosphere, approximate most closely to the short story in their swift narrative flow as well as in their technique and artistic execution.

## 2

After tracing these germs and anticipations of the short story in our past literature, we may next deal with its relations with the novel. The short story in the form of brief satirical sketches of contemporary life with its crazy, unbalanced characters, drunk literally as well as figuratively with the new wine imported from the West, and blatantly flouting all ideals of decency and sobriety in an aping imitation of foreign costumes and customs, was as much the precursor of the novel as a later off-shoot springing from its established vogue and settled form. The *Naba-babu-bilas* (1823) of Bhabanicharan Banerjee is more like a brief novelette than a short story, though its conscious pursuit of a single satirical purpose and deliberate restriction of scope lend to it some characteristics of the latter. The two farces of Madhusudan are dramatised versions of what are in reality short stories and they are prior in point of time to the emergence of the novel. *Alaler Gharer Dulal* (1857) of Tekchand Thakur is a satire which has spread out to include various sections of society and to assume the dimensions of a novel; but in it something of the temper and technique of the satirist turned short-story-writer presides over the detached sketches which are brought together in an arbitrary manner rather than through any organic, inevitable bond of interest. *Hutom Penchar Naksha* (1862) is an undisguised collection of separate scenes of satirical intent and portraiture, with no pretensions to the unity of a novel. The trenchant criticism and observant mood of the writer, his zest in low life and vulgar amusements, is the only nexus that binds the different



chapters together, so that the book might be more aptly designated as a collection of short stories, of humorous extravaganzas.

Eventually it was the big novel that made the earlier appearance. If we have got something significant to say about human life, it would inevitably transcend the limits of the short story. The expansiveness of genius in its first inspiration cannot limit itself within such a narrow compass. The example of English literature as well as the genius of Bankimchandra jointly decided that the novel would appear earlier in Bengali. The short story was to bide its time till the first exuberance of the novel had exhausted itself and till a maturer form of art and a finer selective process would distill the elixir of life in a magic cup of tiny proportions.

The relation between the novel and the short story may be exemplified in the two novelettes of Bankimchandra—*Radharani* and *Yugalanguriya*, in which the art is of a mixed pattern and hovers uncertainly between the two forms. The interest of both the narratives centres on a single point, so that they have the unilinear direction of the short story. But the actual handling aims at an exhaustive treatment of the situation and does not make use of the selective process essential to a short story. The feelings of the heroine in *Radharani* and the management of the intriguing situation, the element of suspense and complication, in *Yugalanguriya* which are dealt with in great detail as well as the number of years over which the action is spread out point however to an affinity with the technique of the novel. Some of the novels of Sanjibchandra, also, testify to the same uncertainty of intention and technique. They are novels which are inevitably brief because of the limited and meagre range of their subject: they exhaust what they have to say in a few pages. But they do not give that impression of suggestiveness, of a section cut out with a special purpose from a bigger panorama of life which gives to the short story its distinctive appeal and haunts the reader with a feeling of

satisfaction and unsatisfied curiosity mingled together in a complex unity.

## 3

The real founder of the Bengali short story as well as its most artistic exponent is Rabindranath Tagore. It was he who first discovered the form of the short story—its unprefaced opening, its quick movement and its suggestive culmination. The Bengali life with its narrow compass and deep feeling generally divorced from dramatic action is specially adapted to the short story, which has reached here a higher standard of artistic excellence, a rarer perfection of form and spirit not equalled by any other literary branch except the lyric. Rabindranath's short stories cover a wide variety of life, romantic, supernatural, love both in its intense passion and wayward impulses, family relations with all their cross-currents of tenderness and conflict, and social criticism. A deaf girl in deep and silent communion with the striving, inarticulate forces of nature, whose separate identity is almost lost in her multitudinous contacts and affiliations, is a typical example of the romantic story (*Shuva*). A boy, alien to the attachments of family life and the entanglements of affection, resisting all attempts to subdue him to domesticity and vanishing into the errant homelessness of an indifferent Nature is another example of superb romantic imagination (*Atithi*). The supernatural stories of Tagore are rich in imagination and fine psychological effects, being purged of all crude and incredible elements. In his *Hungry Stones*, we have the story of a youth enmeshed in the enchantment of an antique building saturated with the ineradicable memories of centuries of sensuous passion, of carnivals of love and beauty and a gnawing heart-ache. The *Nisithe* records how the agonised query of a dying wife, to whom her husband had protested an eternal fidelity, at the sight of her would-be rival had cut so deep in the heart of the repentant husband that every night the pain recurs and must needs unburden itself before the fountains are sealed up with returning day.

Love overflows naturally from the lyric into the story with hardly any change of setting or lowering of the emotional pitch, but there are a few in which rural characters feel the refining influence of the new dawn of passion and childish naughtiness gives way to a shy, dreamy awareness.

Family life, the seat of the most rooted instincts in the Bengali character, furnishes the most appropriate stage on which his little, but intensely passionate, dramas are played out. The undivided family, with its clashes of temperament and will, its criss-crosses of subtle affinities and antagonisms, has been represented in its diverse aspects in Rabindranath's short stories. Banwarilal, whose personality does not fit into his traditional role in the family circle, finds himself isolated and abandoned even by his wife whose love he sought in his personal, unorthodox ways. A younger brother stands by his elder brother's widow whose interests are sought to be grasped by his son and wife through a forged document. Two cousins, separated by bitter family feuds, pathetically stretch their hands for a renewed clasp across the unfordable gulf. A wife stands against her husband to protect the interests of a minor brother committed to her care. Two distant relatives, living under the same roof, the one depending upon the charity of the other, have their relations totally reversed under the stress of a sudden calamity, the protegee being now the protector. These are the little dramas of Bengal family life which are fully exploited by Rabindranath in all their emotional and psychological aspects.

It was rather late in his career that Rabindranath turned his hand to the newly-roused interest in social criticism. Bengali society, with its rigid rules and cast-iron conventions outgrown by the developing needs of a new age and increasing demands for individual freedom, offered a rich target for the shafts of satire and the formulation of a new code of ethical idealism. The stories of social criticism, dominated as they are by a pre-determined motive, are, as a rule, artistically of a lower order, as incidents and character

follow a trend dictated by the needs of social exposure. Nevertheless, some of the most telling and brilliant achievements of Rabindranath are in this line, for when a poet turns satirist, the satire is linked on to more universal issues than those with which it is ordinarily concerned. Mercenary marriages and women forced to sacrifice individuality before the altar of time-honoured tradition are two of the greatest anomalies in our society and have been engaging the attention of literature until very recent times when the iron rules of society have been considerably relaxed and the individual has recovered his dignity and freedom to a large extent.

Prabhatkumar Mukherjee, a younger contemporary of Rabindranath, is the author of a large number of short stories dealing with the more usual incidents and minor, short-lived conflicts of Bengali life. Prabhatkumar had nothing of the poet about him and no trace of the idealising and intensifying tendency of a poetic imagination. He was, on the contrary, a mellow humorist who looks at the foibles of men and women with a mild, forgiving tenderness and always finds a happy ending for their troubles. He seldom penetrates deep into human motives and character but plays with delightful ease on its surface whims and fantasies, the merry, laughable misjudgements and misunderstandings of life, which lead to comic situations and effects. Within his limited sphere he is flawless, if not profound; and he has done more than any one else to popularise the vogue of the short story and to fit it with exquisite tact and judgement to the taste of the middle-class Bengali reading public who want more entertainment than edification from this particular form of art.

## 4

Since the days of Rabindranath, the short story in Bengali literature has been advancing with rapid strides and keeping pace with the swift changes in social organisation and public taste, until to-day it may claim to rank as

the most characteristic and up-to-date art-form with us. It has ramified into such amazing diversity of branches and has been concerned with such infinite variety of motives as to defy all attempts at orderly classification. Its most engrossing pre-occupation has been with that disintegration of social solidarity and the disruption of moral values that have followed in the wake of the two great world-wars. The partition of the country consequent on the attainment of freedom has been as much of a shock to the man of letters as to the political administrator, racking the brains of both these classes for an acceptable human solution and provoking them both to a series of uneasy experiments of a path-finding nature. We are not here concerned with the results of the political experiment which have been generally unfortunate and lacking in durable effects. But the literary experiment, in its immediate and remote working, has led to far-reaching effects in our whole texture of social thought and our idea of the basic elements of human nature. Uprooted humanity, divested of the last shreds of dignity and self-respect, repudiating all traditional moral values as if they were no better than rags and tatters, has set us doubting of the laws of evolutionary progress and the elimination of the beast in man. All accepted general truths have been laid under the microscope of a deep and detailed scrutiny; all feelings have been taken out of their idealistic setting and analysed in their original form of sensations. The most sacred and indissoluble ties have been discovered as owing their apparent sanctity as much to custom and expediency as to the higher attributes of man. Marriage has been looked upon not as the union of souls, not even as an opportunist alliance for a temporary peace, but as a naked and undisguised clash of opposing wills, a state of high tension threatening every moment to develop into a crisis.

Men and women are depicted as possessed of no standard character marked by the fixed epithet of an always

fitting adjective, but as a bundle of inconsistencies, a ceaseless whirl of atoms ever showing themselves in restless combinations, forming, dissolving and re-forming in new shapes as fresh winds of circumstance and motive sweep over them. Characters are shadowy, symbolic, extensions of fleeting moods, embodiments of vague yearnings, and clay in the hands of the potter, circumstance, and have lost the distinctive stamp of their racial culture, being cosmopolitans in a borrowed national dress. The world is, indeed, too much with us and upon us!

As against this general picture, mention must also be made of certain exceptions, who emphasise the old, fast-disappearing traits and the life that, deeply influenced by their background of rural nature, moves in the old, contented grooves and cherishes the time-honoured beliefs, sad and wistful at the change creeping over it. But these writers themselves feel that they are out of tune with the present and write with the melancholy conviction that their subjects have lost their vitality and are but relics of a state of things that has disappeared, never to return any more.

These short stories, so richly varied in their form and contents and presenting so many different moods and attitudes to life, may be broadly classified under two heads—(i) those in which character-interest or psychology predominates, and (ii) those in which the main note is that of social criticism. Even these two broad divisions may tend to overlap in many instances, as character and psychology may, in the last analysis, be due to social factors and the social consciousness may be so all-pervasive as to underlie in the writer's mind the growth of special aberrations in human personality. The same writers may also display an equal interest in both these aspects of life.

In Saratchandra Chatterjee, for example, whose contribution to the short story was not as notable as to the novel proper, we find a blending of motives and interests. His *Abhagir Swarga* and *Mahesh* are stories in which much

of the pathos springs out of social limitations, though the author has no direct desire to castigate society. The frustration from which the low-caste woman suffers and the shadow of persecution that hovers over Ghaffur are the result of social inhibitions which intensify the pangs of poverty and give to their fates the inexorability of something like a divine ordinance. They suffer both in body and mind and the very will to rise above their untoward circumstances is paralysed under a sense of fatalism lying beyond the power of man to counter-act. His *Darpa-Churna* and *Andhare Alo* present characters in conflict and changing in the process without their being interlinked in any way with the wider social background, though in the latter story the transformation involves an indirect criticism of social laws and usage.

## 5

Among authors not directly concerned with social criticism but interested in the painting of characters who have grown up independent of the new social content, mention may be made of Tarasankar Banerjee, Bibhutibhushan Banerjee, Manoj Basu, Bibhutibhushan Mukherjee, Buddhadeb Bose and Achintyakumar Sen Gupta. Of them Tarasankar has specialised in delineating the decadent, feudal society of northern Rarh, with its headstrong, self-willed petty landlords with an exaggerated sense of chivalry and family pride, who fail to realise that the centre of gravity has shifted away from them and who go under as they cannot fit themselves to a changing economic order. He creates a host of characters dependent on this feudal nobility who share the fate of their masters, leaving modern society much the poorer because of the disappearance of their picturesque personality and their odd humours and twists of character. The officers of these feudal landlords with their queer loyalty, their petty tyrannies and exactions upon the tenantry and their astute perversion of the legal machinery—an interesting cross-section of Bengali society;

the retainers, the private army of these Zemindars, who carried on a little dacoity business on their own account; the court-jesters and sycophants living on the leavings of their masters' dishes and enlivening society with their wit and humour; the priestly class, officiating in the famous shrines and places of pilgrimage, the *Bauls* and *Bairagis* and practitioners of Tantric austerities, who cast a spell upon the common people and pandered to their superstitions; the fixed hierarchy of the rural professions, each with its customary rights and duties and each a necessary cog in the complicated social machine; the middle-class families, moving in their narrow orbits, conservative to their fingertips, and very sensitive on the score of their social precedence—the main axis on which pre-modern society revolved; the vagabonds, gipsies and snake-charmers who added a fringe of the picturesque supernatural and of errant, wayward impulses to this too solidly constituted social fabric—all these have been painted with a fulness and gusto that make the dead and dying past live again with the colour and movement of life before our very eyes. Tarasankar's art is rooted in the old traditions and has not taken very kindly to ultra-modern innovations. Great as a painter of the life of the past, preserving its memories with penetrating understanding mixed with wistful pathos, he does not command a perfect mastery of the form of the short story. Life with him bulges beyond the narrow, rigidly prescribed limits of art and subordinates to itself a pure artistic interest in form.

Bibhutibhushan Banerjee had his mind steeped in a poetic symbolism of life. With him the mystery and beauty of nature was as integral a part in life's pageantry as the human figures moving in it, as it was her unseen and all-pervasive influence that shaped the rhythm of these movements. He excelled in the painting of simple rustic characters, with their old-world pieties and superstitions, their experience of the joy of life "in its widest commonalty spread". Their sorrows were as undemonstrative as their joys and were accepted as part of the scheme of life with a



mild acquiescence and patient resignation. A visit to a neighbouring shrine, crossing the railway line or the bazar in course of a brief return to the old haunts of childhood; the recital of a myth or a bit of folklore growing in the rural areas as naturally as wayside bushes and stirring old-world memories in the narration; a contented movement in narrow horizons as if they marked the end of the world; a spell of homesickness in people forced to stay away from the charmed circle of their native places; the thrill of a river-trip in which the invitation of the river-side scenes of nature is as potent a factor as the ostensible object of the journey; a dream-yearning for unvisited places whose very names are musical—these are the frail, delicate stuff of which the stories of Bibhutibhushan are made. In the total impression, they appear as tender and refreshing as dew-drops.

Manoj Basu has something of the same moving simplicity of theme and temper as Bibhutibhushan, and also a flair for subtle supernatural effects. He also resembles Tarasankar in his interest in a mediæval feudal world which has vanished leaving a trail of romantic memory behind. But his interests are too varied to admit of his attaining any sustained excellence in any one of them.

Bibhutibhushan Mukherjee is the humorist of the group, revelling in the creation of farcical situations, wringing pathos out of the imitative precocity of child-life and painting domesticity with its mingled yarn of laughter and tears with restrained and delicate sentimentality. He takes an interest in Bengali families domiciled in Bihar with an odd mixture of social customs and far-away, tender reminiscence of the old homeland, which, withdrawn in reality, lingers wistfully in the memory. Many of his writings are an exquisite mixture of narrative sketches and reflections on humanity and his short stories turn mostly on delicate fantasies half-serious and half-comic inhering like rich plums in the pudding of life.

Buddhadeb and Achintyakumar are writers of short stories with an unfulfilled promise, as their interest has been diverted along other channels. Buddhadeb's in the direction of the larger novel and critical writings, while Achintya has gravitated towards half-lyrical, half-mystical religious discourses. Their stories are over-lyrical and almost symbolic in their intent, in which the ecstasies and bafflements of love weave for themselves a subtle luminosity and iridescence of atmosphere. They are mostly indifferent to the social sense which has little pull upon their brooding and self-centred characters.

## 6

The most prominent among the writers with predominantly social intention are Premendra Mitra, Manik Bandyopadhyay, Sailajananda Mukherjee and Bimal Mitra, Samresh Bose etc. of a younger generation. Premendra is perhaps the most intellectual of the group and his delineations of life are dominated by a morbid psychological and a cynical estimate of its essential meaning. His stories are superbly designed to illustrate his pessimistic thesis, and in their fine adaptation of narrative with the prevailing sentiment are almost like allegories or a symbolical view of life. Grey is the prevailing colour and listlessness the major tone in the life's drama that he depicts. All emotions have lost their pith and vitality and are the dried-up, desiccated remains of what were once fresh and strong, a withered, thorny stalk where once flowers blossomed and smelt sweet. Love, in particular, is like Nessus' shirt which poisons the whole system and cannot be pulled off by any stroke of luck. The loveless couple are doomed to walk side by side on a narrow plank thrown across a raging torrent, and one can only win deliverance from this torture of a life-long companionship by pushing his mate overboard. A tired husband seeking an opportunity for escape is foiled by the unsleeping vigilance of the wife who is bent on denying him this relief and binding him to the

inescapable yoke. A husband cultivates intimate relations with the paramour of his faithless wife and is too fed up with life even to protest, and the three sit side by side on chairs in the verandah, exchanging small talk and insipid commonplaces, while their heart is choked up with the soots of disillusionment. The whole atmosphere is acrid with a suffocating smoke which never blazes out into a flame. It appears as if humanity has committed an inexpiable sin, which has frozen its healthy flow of feelings into an icy torpor and must needs re-echo the words of Macbeth on the utter futility of life. The picture of human life, horrible in its implications and devastating in its effects, is presented with a superb, unfaltering art and a keenness of intellectual penetration that leaves us gasping and helpless.

Manik Bandopadhyay has something of the same temperament as Premendra, but his methods are more analytic and scientific. Whereas Premendra starts from a theory to its illustration in the facts of experience, Manik subjects every experience to a microscopic examination and splits up a general impression into its component elements of consciousness. Nothing is simple and homogeneous—not even the most elementary sensations of the fear of death, the destitution of old age, hunger and sexual instinct; all these, though the foundations of human life, are made up of extremely complex infinitesimal particles of sensations and feelings. He tracks an idea through all its tortuous windings and subtle disguises to its inmost lair in the human hearts and exposes its reality in an unaccustomed, startling form. His writings are a perpetual corrective to that desire for over-simplification, of classing our feelings in fixed, well-defined categories and labelling them once for all as good or bad. He is perhaps the only one of our writers who has accepted the Marxian and Freudian theories with a remorseless consistency for an interpretation of the facts of our life and pursued them to their logical extremity. Whereas Premendra has followed the path of

emotions turned sour and leaving a trail of bitterness and disillusionment, Manik has shown them up as a complex medley of conflicting motives and sensations which leave our life without any unity of direction and purpose. They both reach by different routes the same conclusion and strip life of all its vaunted dignity and idealism, revealing it as either obsessed by a simple perverted idea or as split up into a multitude of conflicting purposes and leading nowhere in particular.

Sailajananda Mukherjee was pioneer in a new field, the life of *coolie* barracks in collieries and other kinds of mills and factories. His interest was mainly in social justice to the victims of an unjust and inequitable treatment, in upholding the cause of the workman against the capitalist. But he also opened up a new vein in delineating the simple, unconventional life of tribal people, with their open and easy manners and their strong, untrammelled passions which were not restrained by any social usage. His work along both these lines was notable, but unfortunately he did not follow up his first successes, but left others to reap where he had sown.

Among women short-story writers, Sm. Asapurna Devi and Sm. Annapurna Goswami deserve creditable mention. Sm. Goswami wrote upon a variety of topics and her powers were steadily maturing when her promising career was cut off by a premature death. In these recent days, women, trained in the same way as men and mixing in each other's society on equal terms, have come to lose their distinctive femininity of touch, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to identify works written by women from internal evidence. Sm. Goswami retained something of this feminine touch, though the dividing line between male and female authors is wearing thinner and thinner every day. Sm. Ashapurna Devi is a more mature artist, with a keen eye for humorous effects and surprises in situation, but she also finds her inspiration along with her male compeers in

the social maladjustment consequent upon the world-wars and the unsettling effect of the partition of the country. She has however the sanity to perceive that it will not do to make Government the scape-goat for all ills under the sun and to hit them for opposite sins of omission and commission. Her short stories are, in short, a plea for a more just and balanced view in respect of our immediate grievances, social and economic, and furnish some corrective to the hysterical exaggeration of censure and melodramatic extravagance of pathos that are the usual attitude of the short-story writer of today.

The younger group of short-story writers, who are just getting into their strides, are casting about for new subjects and methods of approach, but on the whole are continuing the prevalent strains without much of a change. They are taking advantage of the laxity of social manners to introduce subjects which would have raised a blush in the more convention-ridden days. A woman in one of these short stories commits adultery on a sudden impulse just to make herself even with a deceitful husband; in another, a lady of taste and culture and the wife of a high executive officer, with a freakish depravity of conduct, encourages an amour with her chauffeur and volunteers to appear in the court as a victim of outraged modesty while secretly supplying the accused chauffeur with money for conducting his defence. The object of the writer is to focus the search-light on some of the rare monstrosities, the curious and revolting by-products of a hybrid, immoral culture. But the very fact that such repulsive subjects are chosen and executed with the consummate suggestiveness of a highly self-conscious art carries its own condemnation. And this tendency is encouraged by the technique of the short story which is not called upon to explain the genesis of our depraved impulses but takes them for granted and only shows their operation. A few among the younger group are trying to paint the positive side of the new society that is slowly emerging on the ruins of the old and to catch hold of the joy

in life of our workmen, the slow developing rhythm of their occupations, their fellow-feeling and sympathy and the love that shyly shows itself above the rim of consciousness "like beaded bubbles winking at the brim" of a glass of newly poured wine. But as yet we are far off from a new social order which will offer steadiness and coherence to our literary experiments.

## 7

Subodh Ghosh stands apart from all these groups in a secure niche of his own. His subjects, which are neither social nor primarily concerned with character, show a rare inventiveness and a wonderful faculty of evoking an appropriate atmosphere for each and every occasion. He pitches his literary tent on these border lands of life and experience where curious whims and fancies, odd sparks of passion and shocks of circumstance, come together to generate an unwonted thrill of romance. The merest trifle of an incident is enough, when worked upon by the magic of his imaginative re-creation, to swell in bulk and importance and fill up an all-embracing amplitude of atmosphere. He roams at large over the ancient and modern world—a temple strewn with the broken images and relics of antiquity; a feudatory state where mediæval conditions still survive; a coal mine where passionate love gleams in the dark layers of granite; a world-war in which along with the ordinary war efforts an individual heart is filled with strange exaltation and a sense of the fatalism of history; self-propagated scandal-mongering, urged by a craze for notoriety, in a petty provincial town causing a great flutter of nerves and wild waves of speculation. All these subjects and many more come equally home to him, suggesting a curious line of speculation, or opening up a musing vision of beauty, or offering short, revealing glimpses of character or leading up to sudden onset of drama, according as the mood takes him or the promise of the subject hints. His short stories seldom follow the usual pattern, his marshalling of the plot or analysis of the situation always

shoots off at a tangent, giving us not what we ordinarily expect, but a rich surprise, a culmination that leaps over the links of the story and soars to the higher peaks of imaginative possibility. He stands at the opposite pole from writers like Premendra who has spread the procrustean bed on which our crippled emotions must lie down with inescapable logic for its support and Manik who plods over every inch of ground to discover a speck of truth. Subodh on the contrary swoops like an eagle on undiscovered bits of psychology or stray, revealing moods and tempers, and if he misses much he also brings home a rich treasure which few others would have been able to find. His form is not always impeccable, but he holds a promise for its future enlargement and expansion.

Narayan Ganguly also writes short stories generally romantic in their appeal, but he does not seem to have yet developed a philosophy of life which may lend unity to his varied efforts.

The Bengali short story, after a very brilliant career, shows some signs of exhaustion. There is a repetition of motives and an insistence on traits of character, curious rather than profound, on minor issues belonging to the remote fringes of life rather than its central core. In Bengal its further progress seems to be arrested by the rather indeterminate character of the social context which provokes dissent and criticism instead of stimulating towards a positive assessment of life. The turmoil of war and the chaos of thinking it has provoked have marked the end of its golden period in several European countries. The Russian and French short stories are no longer what they were with a universal appeal stretching beyond the countries of their birth and delineating essential humanity which can claim kinship with the people of all lands. The American short story seems also to have entered on a phase of comparative decline after the exciting adventures of a new settlement involving migration of races and treks to unknown destinations together with the

problems of human justice and pity that they raised. They have given way to the somewhat stolid self-complacency of a wide-spread, over-organised prosperity and the rule of the machine has gripped the national consciousness. Bengal has been passing through a great upheaval and a crucial human ordeal and has hardly been able to collect her wits for the next step of advance. The short story here seems to have paused in the midst of its triumphant progress in surveying the scene of confusion spread before it to find out its deeper import and its promise for future progress. It yet remains to be seen whether it can adequately meet the new urge in the human soul. The very facility with which it is turned out breeds a misgiving that it is perhaps degenerating into a mechanical art, a sort of time-killer for the reader and pot-boiler for the writer. How far of the fundamental stuff of life can go into the short story, how far it can delineate significant types of experience and rise beyond ephemeral and topical interests is a question that can be pertinently asked. Its future will depend upon the sort of answer that it can offer to this question that will be asked of all forms of art that aspire after immortality.



## 24

### ESSAYS AND ESSAY WRITERS

(1850-1914)

*Sukumar Sen*

As a literary form in Bengali the essay came into existence some years after the introduction of the literary prose style. This happened in the fifth decade of the last century. Before the emergence of the literary essay, there were short prose compositions on a variety of topics. These non-literary essays belong to four categories chiefly: polemic, religious, didactic, and educative or informative. Polemic writings were started by Rammohan Roy (1772-1833) and good sermonistic essays were produced by Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905). Religious essays were produced by many writers belonging to Brahmo, Christian and Hindu religions. The most successful writers of educative and informative essays were the three best-known Bengali educators of the day—Krishnamohan Banerji (1813-85), Akshoykumar Datta (1820-86), and Iswarchandra Vidyasagar (1820-91). Banerji could not develop a style of his own and his main interest lay in preaching Christianity and teaching classical languages including Sanskrit. The best of his writings of the essay type are to be found in periodicals such as *Upadesak Patrika* (or '*The Instructor: a Christian Periodical in Bengali*'), of which he was the editor. Debendranath Tagore's lectures and sermons on the fundamentals of Brahmoism and Upanishadic thought appeared regularly in *Tattvabodhini Patrika*

started by him in 1843. It was the first of the periodicals in Bengali to be devoted to non-sectarian religion and culture, and it was edited for the first twelve years by Akshoykumar Datta and for one year by Iswarchandra Vidyasagar who were never known to have iterated their faith in public or in private.

The subject of Datta's essays was of the informative and educative nature. "He was specially at home" on scientific topics. The essays first appeared in *Tattvabodhini Patrika* and then compiled in books which enjoyed till very recently unprecedented popularity as school text-books.

Vidyasagar's main achievement was the development of a literary prose style which was ready for handling for all kinds of use. Vidyasagar did not write much in the essay form, but some of his shorter discourses such as *Samskṛita-bhasa O Samskṛita-sahitya Visayaḥ Prastav* ('An essay on the Sanskrit Language and Sanskrit Literature', 1853) are best specimens of literary essays in the third quarter of the century. Two other works of Vidyasagar are also worth mention though they do not strictly conform to the essay type. These are *Prabhavati-sambhasan* ('An address to Prabhavati') and *Svarachita jīvanacharit* ('Autobiography'). Both were published immediately after his death but they had been written some thirty years back.

*Tattvabodhini Patrika* was heavy reading and it could not cater to the needs of an ordinary reader. For this end Rajendralal Mitra (1822-91), with the help of the newly founded Vernacular Literature Society, started in 1851 *Vividhartha-samgraha* ('The Miscellany Magazine'), the first penny magazine in India. It was a monthly publication, big in size and small in the number of pages but copiously illustrated. The articles were generally short and they were mostly written by the editor. The topics included were of general interest: such as history, geography, ethnography, natural sciences, philology and literature. Poetry was not

excluded and criticism of books newly published was a feature that had not appeared in any other Bengali magazine before.

Before 1872 the Bengali essay was of the nature of discourses and as such not a few of them were published as monographs. Vidyasagar's short treatise on Sanskrit language and literature has been mentioned. Another noteworthy monograph was on the defence of Bengali poetry by Rangalal Banerji (1827-87) which was read and debated at a meeting of the Bethune Society. Banerji was a very well-known writer of poetry and for some time he worked as the assistant editor of *Vividhartha-samgraha*.

Some very good discourses and monographs were produced by Rajnarain Bose (1826-99), a pupil and friend of Debendranath Tagore. His monograph on Bengali literature (1878) specially deserves mention. Bhudeb Mukherji (1825-94), a class fellow of Bose in Hindoo College, was also a good writer of discourses. But they are long and to the reader rather heavy going.

The essay as a distinct literary form was introduced by Bankimchandra Chatterji (1838-94), the man who created the novel in Bengali. Chatterji started the monthly magazine *Bangadarsan* ('Bengal Review') in 1872. Herein were first published his essays of various types, numerous and serious, and on various topics such as history and culture, science and literature. Chatterji invited his literary-minded and English-educated friends and colleagues to contribute to his journal. Among those that responded are two of the best writers of the Bengali essay. One was Rajkrishna Mukherji and another was Sanjibchandra Chatterji (1835-89), the elder brother of Bankimchandra. Rajkrishna Mukherji did not write much but his writings bear the stamp of an enquirer and thinker. Sanjibchandra Chatterji was a gifted writer but he never cared much for writing. In spite of unmindfulness his essays, sketches and other prose

writings are enjoyable and their readability has not diminished since. Among his essays, that on *Yatra* or native play-acting should be specially mentioned and his sketches on his early travel in Chotanagpur form an enduring classic in our language.

Kaliprasanna Ghosh (1843-1910) edited and published the *Bandhav* ('The Friend'), a monthly magazine, from Dacca. Until *Bharati* ('The Indian Voice') appeared in 1877, *Bandhav* was the best-known journal after *Bangadarsan*. Ghosh was a good writer of the Bengali prose but his style, unlike that of Chatterji and others, was heavy and Sanskritic, and as this style resembled that of the early style of Vidyasagar, Ghosh was given the title of Vidyasagar by the Pandits of Dacca, and he came to be known popularly as the Vidyasagar of East Bengal. Ghosh's essays, articles and editorial comments in *Bandhav* often show an unwonted critical acumen. The reflective essays collected in his *Prabhatchinta* ('Morning Thoughts', 1877) and *Nisitha-chinta* ('Midnight Thoughts', 1896) enjoyed a vogue for a long time as school text-books.

Among the writers that supported the Neo-Hindu movement in the eighties and nineties of the last century there were some good and powerful writers. Akhsoychandra Sarkar (1846-1917) was the editor of *Sadharani* ('The Commoner'), a weekly and *Navajivan* ('New Life'), a monthly (started in 1884). Sarkar was a regular contributor of *Bangadarsan*. His essays on social and other topics are collected in books among which the earliest is *Samaj-samalochan* ('Review of the Society', 1874). Indranath Banerji (1849-1911) was one of the most distinguished writers that unstintedly patronised the weekly *Bangavasi* ('Bengal Man', 1880), the chief organ of Neo-Hinduism. Banerji excelled in witty and humorous journalese. For some time he edited a small journal of wit and humour, entitled *Panchananda* ('The Reveller in the Punch'). In his later days he wrote some good serious essays pertaining to the Bengali language.

Of the Neo-Hindu group, Chandranath Basu (1844-1910) was the ablest writer of the essay. Basu was a very well-read man and his thinking did not always follow the orthodox path. But his enthusiasm as a conservative brought him into conflict with Rabindranath Tagore.

Dwijendranath Tagore (1840-1926), the eldest son of Debendranath Tagore, was a versatile genius. He had keen aptitude for mathematics, he was a student of philosophy and he was a successful writer in prose and poetry. He could play well on flute. He was the father of shorthand writing in Bengali. His style is entirely his own and it is as forceful as it is smooth and entertaining. His clear comprehension and precise thinking is fully reflected in his essays on religion, philosophy, social problems and political thought. He started the *Bharati* in 1877 and edited it for the first year.

Among those that reviewed the current Bengali literature mention may be made of Purnachandra Basu. His books of literary essays are *Kavyasundari* ('Lady Poetry', 1880), *Sahityachinta* ('Contemplation of Literature', 1896) etc.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) showed a maturity in essay writing at a very early age. His first essay, a long criticism of three newly published books of lyric verse, was written and printed when he was only fifteen. Tagore has written essays on almost every subject—literary criticism, folk poetry, religion, philosophy, history, sociology, politics, music, art-criticism, prosody, philology, astronomy, travelogue etc. Tagore's essentially creative genius is no less fruitful in the field of essay than elsewhere. In his essays Tagore has very often thrown light where there was only darkness and has discovered beauty where there was only dryness. Tagore's critical appreciation of Sanskrit poetry, specially Kalidasa's poetry, has added a new charm to our ancient classics which had practically ceased to be reading matter except to college students. Now-a-days we hear so much of the *Bauls* of Bengal and their esoteric songs. It is

not generally known that it was Tagore who had first drawn our attention to them, and that was as far back as 1884. Tagore's essays on ancient Indian culture have done much towards the regeneration of our country, and his *Bharatvarser Itihaser Dhara* ('Streams of Indian History') has been an eye-opener to the serious student of ancient history of India. His essays on political, social and economic problems of our country are exceedingly valuable, and it will be enough to say that the remedies suggested therein have not lost their efficacy even now, ten or twelve years after the achievement of independence.

In personal essays or *belles lettres*, in humorous essays and in other writings of the type, Tagore has been no less unique and successful. As an epistolarian also Tagore is supreme although he had two predecessors in the field—his father and eldest brother.

Rabindranath Tagore started a monthly journal *Sadhana* ('Exertion') in 1891, which ran only for four years. One of the aims of the journal was to create a batch of young writers that would bring freshness and vigour in the literary and cultural field. It was also intended as the organ that would oppose the reactionary movements that were threatening to stunt the national growth. The response was not very encouraging and Tagore was the main (and not unoften the only) contributor. Among the other writers, two subsequently emerged as very good essay-writers. They are Ramendrasundar Trivedi (?-1919) and Balendranath Tagore (1870-99). Trivedi was a science professor at the College run by Surendranath Banerji. He wrote not only on scientific topics but on religion, philosophy and language too. He wrote also on Vedic ritual. Trivedi's style possesses some of the quality of Tagore's, but unlike Tagore's his style is always terse and gritty. There was another science professor who, like Trivedi, possessed a varied interest. He is Jogeshchandra Roy (1859-1956). Roy's diction too is his own but it is akin to the style of Bankimchandra Chatterji.

Balendranath Tagore was a nephew of Rabindranath. Balendranath died young and his writings bear only an unmistakable promise of maturity. His essays are neat compositions revealing the author's clear and original thinking. He is perhaps the first Bengali writer to attempt art-criticism.

In 1901 the new series of *Bangadarsan* appeared under the editorship of Tagore. In the pages of this journal we find the appearance of a new writer of promise, viz., Brahmapandit Upadhyay (1861-1907). He was a tremendous personality who soon after was lost in the vortex of angry and revolutionary politics. Upadhyay's few essays on religious, cultural and social topics are meagre in quantity but full of a promise never to be fulfilled.

The old journal *Bharati* brought forth a new writer Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951) who had already made a name for himself as the master of the new Indian Art. He developed a prose style which was picturesque on a double count; it was very near the spoken tongue, and it was evocative as a drawing or a painting. His earliest writings were some sketches of manhood from Raiput history and included some short essays on the defence of the new Indian art. His lectures delivered at the University of Calcutta as Professor of Fine Arts are his best essays on art and art-criticism.

Haraprasad Sastri (1853-1936) is the last of the good writers of Bengali prose that had made excursions to the field of Bengali letters from their fold of Sanskrit scholarship. Sastri's early writings appeared in *Bangadarsan* in the eighties of the last century. His reappearance as a Bengali writer happened in the second decade of the present century. Sastri's essays on the various topics concerning cultural, literary, religious and social history of Bengal are important contributions not only to Bengali literature but to Indian scholarship as well. His style shows a happy blending of objectivity and lightness.

Before Tagore had given up editing *Bangadarsan* (new series), Bipinchandra Pal (1858-1932) had come out as a powerful writer. Pal was one of the leaders of the Swadeshi movement and he possessed a rare eloquence both of the tongue and the pen. In many matters Pal did not see eye to eye with Tagore and he was vigorous in his attack against Tagore, which was soon extended to the latter's literary output as well.

Pal was not an isolated phenomenon. There were other writers who would like to go back a century and more in order to attain what they considered 'pure Bengali Spirit'. This was a heavy pull against cultural progress. To counteract this tendency to fall back, Tagore sought the help of Promatha Chaudhuri (1868-1946) who was then emerging as a writer of uncommon ability. This co-operation brought forth the monthly *Sabujpatra* ('The Green Leaf') in 1914, a few months before the First World War. Chaudhuri was one of the promising young men who had responded to Tagore's call in *Sadhana*. But it was not yet the proper time for him. A few years after his return from England where he qualified for the Bar, Chaudhuri came out in the pages of *Bharati* as a vigorous and incisive writer of the essay. His diction is his own. It is based on the speech of the educated men of Calcutta and has since come to be known as *Chalit-bhasa* (i.e. the current language). Tagore also took it up, and so the fate of the *Sadhu-bhasa* (i.e. the old literary language) was sealed.

There was opposition of course from Pal and the orthodox school. The monthly *Narayan*, sponsored by Chittaranjan Das was started in November 1914 as the opponent of *Sabujpatra*. *Narayan* tried its best to rally under it young and old writers that preferred the *Sadhu-bhasa* and the old order. The old writers had to admit defeat and the new writers strayed into new grounds. That is another story.



## 25

### HISTORY

*Bimala Prosad Mukerji*

India's history, as we understand it today, by her own historians is not more than a century old and sooner or later a historiographer will have to tell how different schools of writers and their attitudes emerged into a clear shape and pattern. But a useful stock can be taken all the same of some solid work attempted by our writers in the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth. And it will be seen that of these, scholars from Bengal formed a clear majority whose total output of historical work was by far the largest. The reconstruction of India's history was motivated by an understandable pride in the glory and legacy of a very ancient civilisation. The desire to rediscover and rewrite that past from the Indian point of view was first evinced in Bengal. National and liberal ideas which so profoundly affected European thought in the first half of the last century also activated the Bengali mind which was again the first to receive and intelligently react to the impact of Western ideas and education. The result was the Bengal Renaissance so fruitful in the pursuit of social and educational reform, nationalist ideas and creative learning of which historical study and writing was perhaps the most concrete expression.

Bengali scholars however did not fail to take the cue from the directional trends of Western scholarship and

utilise the skilled methods of British experts in editing and interpreting ancient texts and archaeological finds. Historic discernment may not have been immediately acquired. But competent enthusiasm proceeded to demonstrate that absence of history and historical sense in the past could be compensated by a spirit of enquiry in the present. It has to be noted that we had to start from scratch. Yet all the time Bengal had been making history, she was writing it. Her great thinkers and writers, Raja Rammohan Roy, Bankimchandra Chatterji and Rabindranath Tagore, were all deeply imbued with a sense of history. Bankim and Rabindranath in particular felt that Bengal having little history of her own must hunt up material from forgotten or neglected indigenous sources and record it as best as she could in a spirit of constructive national service. To acknowledge our historic debt, a summation of the activities of Bengal historians from roughly 1820 to 1920, a century of pioneer effort and sustained endeavour, is therefore necessary.

What Alberoni had said about the lack of historical sense and method among the Hindus was still perhaps true at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The only original work so far was *Maharashtra Puran* (1751) by poet Gangaram. But a consciousness of history came with helpful foreign initiative backed by intelligent native co-operation. From this point of view the arrival of Sir William Jones in 1783 as a Puisne Judge of the Old Supreme Court at Calcutta is a historic event. His fascination for the "eventful histories and agreeable fictions of the Eastern World" led to the foundation of the Asiatic Society on 15 January 1784, the object of the institution being an "enquiry into the history and antiquities, arts, sciences and literature of Asia". Little did he dream while making the long and tedious voyage to India that the seedling he would be planting four months later would one day grow into the mighty tree that is modern India in the mental life of which the most hopeful feature is a thirst for history. The *Asiatick Researches* (1788), the

*Quarterly Journal* (1821) and the *Journal* of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1832) soon began to publish learned communications "on new and important discoveries and ideas". The work of Sir William Jones was ably supported and carried on by Dr. H. H. Wilson, Sir Charles Wilkins the first European Sanskrit scholar and epigraphist, Francis Wilford and James Prinsep who however left Calcutta in 1838, having contributed seventy important papers on a variety of topics in the course of thirteen years. But a sure beginning had been made, notwithstanding financial difficulties, that would inspire research among European and Indian scholars alike.

The debt India owes to Western scholars in this field is a matter that bears repetition. During the period 1832-1904, as many as seventy-four volumes of the *Journal* of the Asiatic Society of Bengal were brought out and a cursory glance at their contents will show how many historical monographs and oriental publications were contributed and undertaken by Europeans. Generations of civil servants, administrators and educationists, in spite of colonial bias or imperialistic attitude, in some cases minimising India's cultural greatness, patiently gathered valuable new material for our social and political history. Archaeological and geological surveys, census reports and treatises on land-revenue systems, compiled and edited with care and competence, prepared the solid groundwork. The history of Asokan research is a case in point. Asokan scholarship as it stands today cannot afford to forget the services of James Prinsep, Kittoe, Buhler and Cunningham among others. The story of the momentous discovery of Asokan edicts, their decipherment and the publication of facsimiles, is a romantic chapter in the history of archaeology. It was the work of men like Abbott, Bayley and Cunningham on Indo-Greek sculpture, Bactrian coins and inscriptions and of Prinsep, Wilkins, Kielhorn, Fleet, Hultzsch, Thomas and Rapson on ancient Indian coins and inscriptions that built up step by step the foundation of India's past. While Turnour and Pargiter continued their

studies in Buddhist and Puranic chronology and tradition, Colebrooke and Monier Williams, Cowell and Grierson worked on Indian literature and language and Allan, Burn, Rodgers, Nevill, Wright and Whitehead made intensive studies in Pathan and Mughal coins. One must here recall the services rendered by Major Tod whose *Annals of Rajasthan* (1829) was a remarkable effort in the art of chronicle-writing inspired by a deep love for the land and its people. These are some of the honoured names and others may be added to the list: Beveridge, Blochmann and Irvine whose contributions to Muslim history are permanent. As for regional and local history, we owe a great deal to some of the best scholars who came out to India. James Wise worked on the history of East Bengal, Campbell on Nepal, Monahan on Early Bengal, Taylor on Gujrat, Newall on Kashmir, Gait on Assam, Phayre on Burma and finally Hodgson, an acknowledged authority on Nepal, its society, religion, culture and even its animal life. The works again of such famous European scholars as Koros on Tibetan literature and religion, Hoernle and Sir Aurel Stein on Central Asiatic coins and antiquities, of Risley and Hutton on ethnic types in India, of Hosten on the Portuguese sources of our mediæval history and finally of Vincent Smith on the political history of India as well as the history of her art and architecture are only too well-known.

## 2

Our beginnings were modest. Our writers, mostly educated in English, started with translations owing possibly to the obscurity of our early history. They had to depend and draw freely upon Charles Stewart's *History of Bengal* (1813) which dealt with the period from the Turkish conquest to the Battle of Plassey, and upon the books written by John Clark Marshman: *History of India* (1831), *Brief Survey of History* (1833), both published from Serampore, and *Outline of the History of Bengal* (1839). All these books were meant for use in colleges and schools, and though

based upon such sources as were available at the time, they were neither complete nor accurate. For the better understanding of students, it was felt necessary to bring out Bengali publications in history in some more detailed fashion. To trace the genesis of history-writing in Bengali, we have to go back to the missionaries in Bengal whose printing press at Serampore and use of Bengali types designed by Wilkins gave an impetus to vernacular study and publication. Ramram Basu, William Carey's colleague and Bengali teacher, wrote the first Bengali book on history, *Raja Pratapaditya Charitra*, though some would give the palm of honour to *Rajabali* by Mritunjay Vidyalankar published in 1808, a work on dynastic history kept in circulation up till 1838. But then *Rajabali* is in the nature of a chronicle while the former is a reconstruction of the life of a heroic ruler in Bengal, a work which despite its imaginative elements has been regarded by some scholars as one of proved merit.

Ramram's colleague, Rajiblochan Roy, next wrote a book, *Raja Krishna Chandra Rayasya Charitra*, where the author somewhat falsified history by idealising the ruler of Nadia. In 1830, Haliram Phukan, an Assamese, brought out Assam *Buranji*, a chronicled history of Assam in Bengali. On the side of social history, three notable publications of the time have to be mentioned: *Vaidyotpatti* (1830), *Kulapradeep* (1832), and *Biprabhakti-Chandika* (1832) dealing respectively with the geneological history of Vaidyas, Kayasthas and Brahmins. These three works may have left an impression on Bankimchandra Chatterji who wrote his well-known essay on *Bangey Brahmanadhikar* in 1875 and on Lalmohan Vidyanidhi whose *Sambandha-nirnaya* (1875) must be regarded as the first important piece of social history of the principal Hindu castes in Bengal. In 1832 again, twelve Bengali gentlemen under the direction of the Committee of Public Instruction translated Robinson's *Grammar of History* which was a short course of ancient, mediæval and modern civilisations.

It should be noted that round about 1840, a band of Derozians used to meet for discussion in a Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge where some interesting papers on Indian history and culture were read. One of its active members was Gobindachandra Sen, author of a pamphlet on Indian History (1839), who now brought out *Banglar Itihas* (1840). It was practically a Bengali version of Marshman's book but the first work none the less on the history of Bengal written in vernacular. With the second phase of new education introduced by the joint efforts of Bentinck and Macaulay, more and more translations and adaptations of English authors were undertaken to be prescribed as suitable text-books. Pandit Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Bengal's great scholar and reformer, undertook a new rendering of Marshman's book. His *Banglar Itihas*, Part 2, dealing with the period of early Company rule from 1757 to 1835, came out in 1848-49, while the first part was done ten years later by Ramgati Nyayaratna, playwright and social satirist, at the request of Vidyasagar, covering the period from the rule of the Valdyia Kings of Bengal to that of Alivardi Khan. Bhudeb Mukherji, distinguished educationist and writer of social essays, who incidentally was the first Bengali to "advocate Hindi as the language of Indian unity", brought out the third part (1865-66) of Bengal history roughly covering the years between 1835 and 1865. But perhaps the most noteworthy publication of the time, an original work in Bengali, was Rajkrishna Mukherji's *A Primer of Bengal History* (1874). Eulogised by Bankim, this small volume ran through thirty-four editions in about a dozen years. Many other text-books on the history of Bengal were written in the last forty years of the past century with gradual improvement in detail and idiom. Of these, *Banglar Itihas* (1899) by Rajanikanta Gupta, celebrated author of *Sipahi Yuddher Itihas*, and Kaliprasanna Banerji's *Banglar Itihas—Nawabi Amal* (1901) deserve special mention. The latter, a factual but very readable book in about five hundred pages giving a full

account of the history of Bengal from 1707 to 1765 with maps and illustrations, has lost none of its interest even today inspite of new researches in the field.

Apart from provincial history, the general history of India served in handy volumes was engaging the serious attention of some of our writers who felt encouraged by significant finds and discoveries. In 1840, Gopallal Mitra, elder brother of Raja Rajendralal Mitra, wrote a history of India on the model of Marshman's book. Six years later, Nabinchandra Banerji brought out a similar volume of Indian history, called *Sarabali*, but a little more original. Another interesting publication was Baidyanath Mukherji's *Bharatavarsiyetihās-Sara-Samgraha* in two volumes (1848-50) which included events up to 1843 and was refreshingly critical of European comments on Hindu society and religion. But a really striking piece of work was *Punjabetihās* (1848) by Rajnarain Bhattacharya, which was indeed the first historical work on a particular region by another provincial and based on original as well as printed sources such as *Raja-tarangini*, *Ain-i-Akbari*, *Seir-Mutakherin*, Prinsep's *Ranjit Singh*, Lawrence's *Adventures in the Punjab* and McGregor's *Sikhs*. The book ran into three editions and aroused so much enthusiasm that the first edition was subscribed in advance by three hundred and twentyfive readers. Popular curiosity and excitement must have been due to the defeat of the Sikhs, a formidable martial people. Nilmoney Bysack's *History of India* is another important publication (1856-58) in three volumes covering Hindu, Muslim and British periods, a work decidedly superior to average text-books and no mere translation.

Thus some progress had been made and our writers, starting with borrowing and adaptation, had made more ambitious efforts and evolved some kind of method and order in the process. With periodisation, Bengal as well as Indian history came to be fuller and with the utilisation of new material found and collected, more accurate. Perhaps,

one of the best contemporary samples of work in provincial history, political as well as cultural, was *Bengal* (1874) by Sashichandra Datta, uncle of the renowned historian R.C. Dutt, who also wrote under the pseudonym Barton two other volumes, *Ancient World* and *Modern World*.

Meanwhile, the Adi Brahmo Samaj was taking an active part in the social and intellectual regeneration of Bengal. Its celebrated organ, *Tattabodhini*, started in 1843 by Debendranath Tagore, succeeded in drawing a group of writers chief among whom was Akshoykumar Datta, a serious essayist. Two of his contributions in particular with a really historical outlook deserve special mention; one, *On Sea-Voyages of the Ancient Hindus* and the other on the different *Religious Sects in India*, possibly inspired by Wilson's *Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus* (1828-32). In this connection, one would like to recall the part played by Rev. James Long in Bengal's social history. He published an English rendering by the great Bengali poet Michael Madhusudan Datta of the famous play *Neel-Darpan*, a pungent social satire by Dinabandhu Mitra, which exposed the ruthless exploitation of cultivators by indigo-planters in Bengal. Rev. James Long was a true friend of the Indians, deeply interested in their languages and literatures. His wide range of interest in India's cultural history is amply demonstrated by some of his papers contributed to the Asiatic Society *Journal* e.g. *Queries on the Archaeology of India*, 1847; *Analysis of the Bengali Poem Rajamala or Chronicles of Tripura*, 1850 (subsequently edited by Kailashchandra Sinha in 1876); *Notice of a Ruin in Singhbhum*, 1851; *Analysis of the Raghuvamsa* and *Notes and Queries suggested by a Visit to Orissa*, 1859. But his most important work in bibliography was a *Descriptive Catalogue* of 1400 vernacular works and pamphlets.

Bankimchandra Chatterji, known chiefly as a novelist and maker of *Bande Mataram*, was however responsible for a drive in reconstructing the history of Bengal. His



famous journal *Bangadarsan* became a forum where the elite of Bengal met and discussed the problems of cultural history. It is true that Bankim was primarily an artist, a writer par excellence of romances of historical imagination and that he had a pronounced nationalist bias. Yet he was a social thinker who stressed the need for history, for knowing it and writing it in our mother-tongue. To him a consciousness of history was the first step to real awakening. Acting on the belief that writers should not be under perpetual tutelage to European masters, he issued in 1880 a stirring call to his countrymen to come forward and search for the past that is buried, that need not be the exclusive pursuit of a handful of scholars alone. He took the initiative and wrote some important original essays between 1872 and 1884 on *Bangadeshiya Krishak*, *Bangalir Bahubal*, *Banglar Itihas*, *Bangalir Utpatti* and *Banglar Itihaser Bhagnansha*. He had also written two papers in English on the *Origin of Hindu Festivals* (1869) and on *Bengali Literature* (1871) in the *Calcutta Review*.

## 3

So much by way of mental preparation on perhaps an emotional basis. But the man who raised studies in Indian history and culture to a scientific status was Rajendralal Mitra (1822-1891). To him more than any other single person, Bengal, for the matter of that India, owes a considerable debt, a fact which perhaps did not obtain due recognition as Poet Tagore once so pointedly remarked. He was our first original historian trained in Western methods. A man of remarkable talent and self-made scholar, his first opportunity came with his appointment as Assistant Secretary and Librarian to the Asiatic Society in 1848 where he came in contact with some of the best Western minds. Here he began serious investigation into ancient history and literature. Even after his retirement from service in 1858, his connection with the Asiatic Society continued firstly as a Fellow, then as a Member of the Council and finally its Secretary. Ultimately he became the first Indian President

of that august body. It was a unique honour which European compeers did not shirk to bestow on one whose work on Indology satisfied even the most exacting standards. It is not possible to give any full account of his historical researches within a limited space, one can do no more than barely enumerate his many-sided scholarly activities. His papers and monographs published in the *Journal* and *Proceedings* of the Asiatic Society alone mount up to more than a hundred. During the years 1855-1887, he contributed no less than thirty-eight original articles on such different topics as Buddhist ruins and relics, Sanskrit inscriptions from Apsar and Mathura, copper-plate inscriptions of the Guptas and land-grants of Kanouj kings, Hindu and Muslim coins, temple-architecture of the Gupta age, and even social history dealing with food and drink, funeral ceremonies and human sacrifices in ancient India. His erudition was almost staggering and his varied but thorough knowledge is unrivalled even today. He could pass on with ease from the commemorative record of the Sena Rajas of Bengal (1855) to a comparative study of Buddhism and Odinism, their similitude (1858) or from racial history (*On the identity of the Toramanas of Eran. Gwalior & Kashmir*, 1861) to a linguistic study (*On the Origin of the Hindi language and its relation to the Urdu dialect*, 1864). He could write with as much discernment on the supposed identity of the Greeks with the Yavanas of the Sanskrit writers (1874) as on representation of foreigners in the Ajanta frescoes (1878). The knotty problem of identifying Patanjali with Gonikaputra and Gonardiya (1883) invited his scholarly attention as much as the psychological tenets of the Vaishnavas (1884).

It has to be remembered that the gates of Indian archaeology had been opened only recently by Prinsep and the work of transcription and decipherment of Asokan epigraphs had just begun. Rajendralal Mitra applied all his zeal and scholarship to this newly founded branch of knowledge and succeeded in harnessing numismatics and epigraphy to the task of unlocking many a hidden chamber of

India's past. He did not and could not solve all the puzzles of our ancient history but he discovered not a few facts and certainly revealed some new aspects of those problems. His specialised studies are all sure proofs of his method and approach. Rajendralal devoted years of study to the rule of the Palas and Senas in Bengal and was the first to familiarise the Lakshmana Era, not altogether a dead reckoning. Again, his careful editing of some of the *Brahmanas* and *Aranyakas* and his publication of a *Descriptive Catalogue* of many rare manuscripts not only showed his scholarship but also revealed the richness of our cultural heritage. Of his great contribution to our knowledge of ancient Indian history and culture, it is never enough to say. His *Indo-Aryans*, a collection of varied articles, particularly on the antiquities of Bodh Gaya and Orissa, is an excellent sample of equipment and performance. His famous *Catalogue* brought to light many a priceless manuscript of Sanskrit texts found in Nepal and thereby opened up a new field of literary-cum-historical research, later on taken up by H. P. Sastri. The extremely sober and scholarly way in which he discussed data while giving his readings of coins and inscriptions drew unstinted praise from renowned Western scholars. Despite the mild banter of a few like Fergusson and Cunningham, time has justified some of his findings and proved that an Indian scholar handicapped by lack of resources and facilities could compete, in grasp and precision, on terms of equality with European scholars. Not all his interpretations or conclusions have been tenable. But, as Ernst Troeltsch has said, there are times when it is more important to make an important beginning than to produce the finished article. As a pioneer, his approach and handling of original source-material have to be acknowledged without a question.

Rajendralal's service to his native language deserves no less recognition. He is the first to have started a historical journal and a review in Bengali, the *Bibidhartha-Samgraha* and *Rahasya-Sandarbha*. He was also the first to plead for a

correct revision of Bengali spellings and a compilation of geographical terms in Bengali in the first two sessions of the Saraswat Samaj founded by Jyotirindranath, elder brother of Poet Tagore. He died full of years and honours. If the Asiatic Society of Bengal had elected him President, the Calcutta University conferred on him LL.D. (Honoris Causa), an occasion on which Vice-Chancellor Hobhouse remarked in his address: "He is.....a scholar and critic in our sense of the word.....thoroughly imbued with principles which men like Colebrooke, Lassen and Burnouf have followed in their researches.....his arguments would do credit to any Sanskrit scholar in England."

Haraprasad Sastri continued in a sense the tradition of Rajendralal Mitra whose pioneer work on the Pala and Sena Dynasties of Bengal must have inspired the young scholar to search more source-material. The credit of discovering in 1897 and editing the only extant manuscript of Sandhyakaranandi's *Ramacharitam*, a unique historical composition in 'Kavya' style, must go to him though the text and commentary he found was incomplete. In the course of a fairly long life, he was associated with the Sanskrit College at Calcutta as its Principal, the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, the Asiatic Society and Varendra Research Society. Incidentally, the last-named organisation founded at Rajsahi in 1910, owed its inception to Kumar Saratkumar Roy of Dighapatia and rendered invaluable service to historical research by publishing the only three original source-books of Bengal history: *Ramacharitam* by Pandit Haraprasad Sastri (1910), *Gauda-lekhamala* by Ramaprasad Chanda (1912), and *Inscriptions of Bengal* by Nanigopal Majumdar (1929). To the *Journal* of the Asiatic Society, H. P. Sastri contributed about thirty papers most of which dealt with his favourite subjects, Sanskrit and Buddhist literature and Nepalese manuscripts. His discovery of a work by Aryadeva in Sanskrit and edition of *Chatuhsatika*, his recovery of a lost epic by Aswaghosa, of the *History of Nyayasastra* from Japanese sources, his finding of the dates of Subandhu and Din-naga

and essay on the origin of the Indian Drama clearly indicate his sphere of interest. His most important articles on ancient history were those on the Kharosthi copper-plate inscription of Taxila and the origin of the Sungas. Some of his conclusions are untenable today, for instance, that on militant Brahminism as the cause of the downfall of the Mauryas, based as it was on Senart's mis-interpretation of a passage in Minor Rock Edict I. But his massive scholarship, particularly displayed in his study of Buddhism in Bengal, was his own. He was one of the first to refute Professor Max Muller's theory of the renaissance of Sanskrit literature in the 4th century A. D. (1910), a point of view supported by Havell, another eminent critic and protagonist of Indo-Aryan culture. One might conclude by saying that association with Bankim, a close neighbour, at an early stage of his career probably influenced his studies and researches. Haraprasad Sastri's work on the folk-element in our literature and social culture deserves particular mention. This is a subject which also engaged the serious attention of Panchkari Bandyopadhyay who was not only an irrepressible journalist but a powerful writer of solid social essays.

Before we pass on to other notables we ought to mention the work of Saratchandra Das, a fearless traveller and a deep student of Tibetan culture. Between 1881 and 1907, he made a notable contribution of thirty-two papers dwelling on different aspects of Tibetan religion, language and history, his work on Tibetan Buddhism being next in importance to that of Alexander Koros. Two other scholars now almost forgotten, Pratapchandra Ghosh and Chandrasekhar Banerji, carried on research work as early as the seventies of the last century. While Banerji worked on the antiquities of Orissa found at Cuttack and Jajpur (1870-71), Ghosh made a transcript of the Badal Pillar inscription at Dinajpur, translated and annotated the copper-plate inscriptions from Bamanghati and Sambalpur in 1871 and 1877. He also wrote two interesting articles on the adjustment of the Hindu Calendar (1868) and on tree and serpent worship

in India (1870). Another scholar, Nagendranath Bose, worked on the inscriptions of the Sena Kings of Bengal and the Kings of Orissa and published seven papers between 1896 and 1900.

## 4

Among scholars who made substantial contributions to Indology are Monomohan Chakrabarti and Rakhaladas Banerji, the famous archaeologist. Between 1892 and 1916, Chakrabarti wrote no less than twenty-seven papers for the *Asiatic Society Journal* and a glance at the list will tell that his interest was not confined to the architecture or epigraphic records of Orissa alone, though along with R. D. Banerji, he partially reconstructed the history of ancient Orissa from coins and inscriptions. But he showed his very wide range of studies by writing on *Navya-nyaya* and *Smṛiti* in Bengal and Mithila, on *Pavana-dutam* by Dhoyika, court-poet of Laksmāna Sena, on temples and pre-Mughal mosques in Bengal, on Sikkim copper coins, on the genuineness of the eighth canto of *Kumara-sambhavam* and on the geography of old Bengal. His essay on the animals in the inscriptions of Piyadasi is an interesting sample of specialised research. Mention should also be made here of Manomohan Ganguli's *Orissa and Her Remains* (1912), the first full and descriptive account of some of the finest specimens of Orissan temple-architecture.

R. D. Banerji is a name to conjure with and his untimely death has left a void difficult to fill. As one responsible for the rediscovery of Mohenjo Daro in 1922, which led to further discoveries of extensions of the Indus Valley culture, he along with Sir John Marshall ushered in a very important epoch of Indian archaeology. As a numismatist, he was an acknowledged authority of perhaps the same stature as Cunningham and Rapson. He discovered and interpreted many types of coins: punch-marked coins found in Afghanistan; Kushan, Gupta and Audumbara coins of new varieties; Pratihara gold and Chandella silver coins; coins of mediæ-

val Bengal and Tripura. The finest fruit of his numismatic research was *Ancient Coins* written in Bengali (1915-16). He discussed with consummate ease Indo-Greek, Scythian, Parthian and tribal republican coins of ancient India, Hindu and Muslim coins of mediæval India, particularly Sher Shah's coins minted at Pandoah, as well as other types of coinage which threw new light on regional history (1908-20). As an epigraphist again, he read and interpreted the important Hathigumpha inscription of King Kharavela of Kalinga (1929), two inscriptions of Kumaragupta I (1909), some grants and inscriptions of Bengal rulers (1909-1914), and brought out a valuable *Catalogue of Inscriptions* in the collection of the Asiatic Society. Some of his interpretations stand challenged and criticised, but not even his worst critics have questioned his talent and equipment. He was indeed a brilliant Indologist and historian and whatever his shortcomings, they pertained to genius. Not only did he contribute more than thirty highly original papers between 1906 and 1929, but also write the famous *History of Bengal* in two volumes (1915 and 1917), *History of Orissa* (vols. I-II) and *Prehistoric and Hindu India*. Incidentally, his *Palas of Bengal* (1915) is the standard work on the subject, completing as it did the line of research started by Rajendra-lal Mitra and H. P. Sastri. His love for Bengali language and literature is clearly shown by his fixing the date of the manuscript of *Srikrishna-Kirtan* from a study of the gradual development of the Bengali script. He wrote two fine historical romances, *Mayukha* and *Dharmapala*, and his famous *History of Bengal* in Bengali.

Ramaprasad Chanda, a contemporary of R. D. Banerji, was a reputed archaeologist, the celebrated author of *Indo-Aryan Races* (1916), an authoritative work on the ethnology of ancient Bengal. His earlier publication *Gauda-rajamala*, published by the Varendra Research Society in 1912 was indeed the first application of the scientific method in writing a history of Bengal, impartial and accurate. Chanda's mantle as a pre-historian seems to have fallen upon Dr.

B. S. Guha who in collaboration with Seymour Sewell has laid the scientific basis for the racial history of India. Two other names deserve special mention in this connection: Surendranath Majumdar, Sanskrit scholar and editor of Cunningham's work on ancient Indian geography, originally published in 1872, and Nanigopal Majumdar whose brilliant career as an archaeologist was cut short most unfortunately while on duty. He contributed handsomely to the study of Kharosthi inscriptions, supplemented Chanda's *Gauda-rajamala* and indicated many sites of Harappa culture along the Indus belt in a series of brilliant explorations.

All the time history was being made, a few coteries had been formed which drew scholars together in research work. One was at Berhampore where lived Ramdas Sen, almost a forgotten name today, but a genuine scholar and antiquarian who did much to activate historical research in Bengal. Ramdas Sen's collected works, *Aitihasik Rahasya* in three parts (1874), indicate his extensive knowledge of the history, philosophy and literature of ancient India while his son-in-law Nikhilnath Roy brought out his well-known *Murshidabad-Kahini* in 1898 and his *History of Murshidabad* in 1904. But it was Akshoykumar Maitra who was the life and soul of not only the Varendra Research Society at Rajsahi but also of the new movement for the reconstruction of Bengal history. He was a friend and collaborator of Rabindranath when the poet was editing *Sadhana* (1895), *Bharati* (1898) and *Bangadarsan* new series (1902-03). Maitra's famous book *Sirajuddowla* serially published in the journals came out in 1897 and received high praise from Tagore. In 1899, he started a journal *Aitihasik Chitra* from Rajsahi which, though short-lived, did valuable work by publishing original work as well as translations of *Riyaz-us-Salatin* by Rampran Gupta and *Indika* by Bhabanigobinda Chaudhuri. Rabindranath himself wrote a remarkable preface to this journal, laying down lines of real independent research on local and regional



history. Maitra's significant original works besides *Sirajuddowla* were *Mir Kashim* (1905) and *Gauda-lekhamala* (1912), a revealing study of the copper-plate grants and inscriptions of the Kings of Bengal. It is no exaggeration to say that Maitra was the leading Bengali historian of his day who opened up new possibilities of writing history, critical and well-documented. Another member of the Varendra Research group was Nalinikanta Bhattasali who wrote *A Forgotten Kingdom of East Bengal* (1914) and began his studies on coins and inscriptions in the early twenties.

## 5

The year 1870 can be taken as a turning point, for the next thirty or forty years produced a spate of original publications on political as well as cultural history. Here again Bankim was the path-finder. Colebrooke's researches on Indian language and literature had of course provided the inspiration. But Bankim's essays on *A Popular Literature for Bengal* (1870) and *Bengali Literature* (1871) embodied a new aspiration. Prior to this, poet Iswarchandra Gupta had brought out a compilation of eighteenth century poetical works and Harimohan Mukherji in 1869 had published his *Kavi Charit*. But immediately after Bankim's hopeful effort came Mahendranath Chatterji's *Bangabhasar Itihas* (1871) and *Essays and Lectures on Bengali Language and Literature* by Ramgati Nyayaratna (1872-73) and Rajnarain Bose (1876). Rameshchandra Datta's the *Literature of Bengal* and Pearychand Mitra's the *Hindu Bengal* were published in 1877 and 1880. Rameshchandra Datta's book not only gave an accurate idea of the trends of Bengali literature but showed how far "the inner life, the thoughts, the feelings, the real life of Bengal" were reflected in her literature. Dineshchandra Sen's *Bangabhasa O Sahitya*, subsequently developed, was first published in 1896 and was perhaps the best fruit of literary research based on original manuscripts and local records. Sen's effort received due praise from Tagore and knowledgeable critics.

Our survey of works on social history would be incomplete without referring in particular to Pandit Sibnath Sastri's remarkable book on Ramtanu Lahiri (1904), a Derozian and distinguished teacher, which is at the same time an excellent social document on contemporary Bengal. Written in delightful prose, it attracted immediate attention and an English version was brought out by Lethbridge (1907) under the significant title: *Ramtanu Lahiri—A History of the Renaissance in Bengal*. Sibnath Sastri's other two books, *History of the Brahmo Samaj* (1911-12) and *Autobiography* (1918), are really companion volumes and the three books together are indispensable to any student of Bengal's social and cultural history in the nineteenth century. Bipinchandra Pal, known chiefly as orator and politician, also wrote three books dealing with Bengal's religion and culture: *Study of Hinduism*, *Bengal Vaishnavism* and *Nava Yuger Bangla*.

Rameshchandra Datta gave shape to Bankim's ideas. To revivify our history and culture, he rendered the Rg Veda into Bengali (1888), wrote his *History of Civilisation in Ancient India based on Sanskrit Literature* (1889-90) and *Lays of Ancient India* (1894). The great Epics condensed into English verse (1900) were a magnificent achievement, while his historical romances were similarly designed to make stirring times live once again. He realised, as he said in the preface of *A Brief History of Ancient and Modern Bengal* (1892), that the main thing in history was a connected and clear story of the people based upon and related to their "material condition and progress, their literature and philosophy, their agriculture and trade".

Such a view of history could come natural to a person trained on right lines and equal to the task of writing it. Of intellectual equipment, there was no doubt. A civilian and scholar, spending much of his time in England where he wrote most of his books, and Lecturer in History at the London University, he may have been familiar with the trends of historical researches in the West and driven to

the conclusion that without an economic background and perspective no real or full history of a country at a particular time could be known or written. In 1874 he had made a tentative approach to economic history in the *Peasantry of Bengal*. His object in writing it was to describe their condition under Hindu, Muslim and British rule and to consider the means for improving their prospects. It may be noted here that Sanjibchandra Chatterji, Bankim's elder brother, had written *Bengal Ryots—their Rights and Liabilities* in 1864 with a somewhat similar purpose. In Bankim's own words, it was the product of some sustained labour. It gave first of all an account of the previous condition of the *ryots*, then a short history of tenancy laws under British rule and their consequences, next a critical examination of the Act X of 1859 and it ended with a discussion of means calculated to improve their condition. Rameshchandra Datta's next attempt in this direction was *Famines in India*, an article published in *Fortnightly Review* (1897) at a time when he was planning his *Economic History of India*. Having retired from civil service, he was now free to take up a work which involved serious criticism of the effects of British rule on our country's economy.

In his magnum opus, *Economic History of India* in two volumes (1901-1903), R. C. Dutt gave the first connected analytical picture of British Indian economy under the Company and the direct rule of the Crown. Some English critics called his thesis an admirable pretext for bolstering his nationalist views. But what he really wanted to say and prove was that the condition of the poor peasants required improvement in an agrarian country where they should be allowed to draw their sustenance from the land by minimisation of rents. Incidentally, Raja Rammohan Roy in his communication to Parliament in England (1831) had protested against the misrule of landlords and advocated a fixed rent-roll with a permanent settlement for the actual cultivators. R. C. Dutt's work has been sometimes interpreted as a defence of the Permanent Settlement. But possibly

what he did was to shift the emphasis from the Zemindari system with its evils to the *Ryotwari* system obtaining in South India as the greater cause of mischief and to show that subsequent land regulations had steadily increased the power of landlords and thus defeated the original purpose of the Settlement by systematically encroaching on the occupancy rights of the tenants. Transfer of the ownership of land not being feasible, the aggressive rights of Zemindars should be checked and curtailed. The Government's right to increase rents and the landlords' drive for the maximum had led to severe drainage and exploitation. Legislation had sadly confused the British idea of contract with the Indian idea of status, for so long the basis of our socio-economic structure. Whatever his stand, R. C. Datta's work is a great achievement solidly prepared with the help of Blue Books, State Papers and all the material then available. No other scholar except Baden Powell in *Land Systems of British India* (1892) had made or has attempted such a thorough study of the subject.

Our historians continued to work in their individual spheres until 1905 when the Bengal Partition and Swadeshi upsurge intervened and added a new impetus. A history of the Dawn Society and the National Council of Education, formed under the inspiring leadership of Satishchandra Mukherji, that true friend and promoter of Indian culture, has been well told in the *Origins of the National Education Movement* published by Jadavpur University in 1957. What is relevant to our purpose is the starting of the *Dawn* in 1897, a monthly journal which was a common platform for some of our best thinkers and writers up to 1913. Papers on history, economics and sociology, philosophy and religion were published regularly. It was in the second phase of the *Dawn* (1904-07) and the third (1907-13) that sound historical articles based on research in ancient history and culture began to appear. Impelled by nationalist idealism, a band of young scholars became members of the Society and regular contributors to the journal. It was here that Dr.

Radhakumud Mookerji wrote his first paper on *The Wonderful Unity of India: A Deeper View*. Dr. Mookerji's subsequent contributions to Maurya and Gupta history and Asokan studies are well-known. Another silent research worker was Haranchandra Chakladar whose scholarly papers on *Maritime Activity and Enterprise in Ancient India*, *Ship-building and Maritime Activity in Bengal* received high praise from competent critics. Later, H. C. Chakladar joined the Post-Graduate Department of the Calcutta University where he carried on higher studies in social history and ethnology. Two other brilliant pupils of Satishchandra Mukherji were Rabindranarayan Ghose and Benoykumar Sarkar. The former wrote some important original papers on *India's Literary Wealth*, *Indian Nationalists and Indian Art*, *the Civilisation of Northern India* and *Interpretation of Indian Art in the light of Indian Literary Records*, the last-named paper being singled out by Havell for particular praise. Sarkar's noteworthy contributions to the *Dawn* were *Sikṣa-Vijnāner Bhumikā* and *Introduction to the Science of Education*. Benoykumar Sarkar was a reputed social thinker. Among his later publications should be mentioned *Positive Background of Hindu Sociology* (1914) and *Folk-element in Hindu Culture* (1917), two important contributions to the study of regional culture-pattern. In the *Dawn*, there was a regular feature called 'Indiana' which discussed different themes of India's social and cultural history such as the Bengal Village, Cities and Towns of India, India's Trading Classes, Maharashtra Brahmīns, Social Life in Gujrat, Principal Languages of Modern India, Sindhi Mussulmans and Muhammadan Population of Bengal. Another interesting paper was *Fifty Years Ago* by H. C. Chakladar, which discussed the condition of Bengal peasantry under European indigo-planters.

## 6

Sir Jadunath Sarkar who died only recently was perhaps the last of the giants. A great educationist and historian of

international reputation, he came to occupy a unique position of respect in our intellectual life. He received the admiring recognition of Tagore, some of whose stories and essays he translated with credit. Though history was his research and recreation, he was well-grounded in English and Bengali literature. A critical assessment of his work will come in time, one can only indicate here his line of research and mention his major works. His first essay into history began with Aurangzib, his favourite study. Originally a thesis for the P.R.S. examination, this was elaborated into a book, *India of Aurangzib* (1901). Subsequently, a comprehensive history of the last of the great Mughals was published in four volumes during the period 1912-24. A study of *Chaitanya, His Pilgrimage and Teachings* (1913) was followed by an important work on Maratha history, *Shivaji and His Times* (1919). Then came *Mughal Administration* (I-II, 1920-25) followed by his magnum opus, *Fall of the Mughal Empire* (I-IV, 1932-50). The *House of Shivaji* (1940) completed his research on Maratha and Deccan history. Besides, Sir Jadunath edited three major volumes of historical work: *Ain-i-Akbari*, *Poona Residency Correspondence* and *Dacca History of Bengal, Vol. II*, which are the products of not only stupendous labour but of conscientious editorship. In the Preface of the last book, he rightly pointed out that the history of the Muslim period had not been so carefully or accurately worked upon as ancient Indian history and was still full of 'pious frauds' some of which he himself exploded. Other works of his include *Economics of British India* (1909), *Anecdotes of Aurangzib* (1912), *Studies in Mughal India* (1919) and *India Through the Ages* (1928). Among his works in Bengali, special mention must be made of *Shivaji*, *Maratha Jatiya Villash*, *Patnar Katha* and some learned and lucid introductions to the historical novels of Bankim like *Durgesh-nandini*, *Anandamath*, *Sitaram* and *Rajsinha*. His prefaces to the works of Brajendranath Banerji, Satishchandra Mitra, Harihar Seth and particularly to Dr. Niharranjan Roy's *Bangalir Itihas*:

*Adi Parva*, giving a new approach to social history, are indeed illuminating.

For nearly sixty years, Sir Jadunath worked with singular devotion on Mughal and Maratha history, a history he revitalised with all its political complications and intriguing interest. As a historian, he cannot be said to have belonged to a particular group or organisation. An institution by himself, he worked more or less alone in a field where he had no equals. But he definitely inspired many a modern scholar and his last published article in *Bengal Past and Present* is a kind of testament to the younger generation of researchers. In some of his essays he has expressed what he believed to be the goal of a historian. This is *truth* on which all sound history must rest, truth pleasant or unpleasant derived from data sifted and studied scientifically. He did not believe in partial or unwarranted reconstruction, for facts have to be verified and judged whether they hurt or support our national prestige. Our knowledge of the past, he said, our relation to it and evaluation of the same must be guided by the passion for truth. For his monumental study of the disintegration of the mighty Mughal empire he has been compared with Gibbon. But more fittingly he recalls Ranke in his long life of sustained endeavour and disinterested pursuit of historical knowledge.

A new drive for historical research in Bengal was initiated on an institutional scale by Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee, a great Vice-Chancellor but greater as a man with vision and purpose. In the newly opened Post-Graduate department (1917) he introduced two new subjects: Ancient Indian History and Culture and Indian Languages, with a view to encouraging active research and enriching our own language and literature. That his mission was successful is borne out by the excellent record of research in Bengal, both in ancient and modern history. Dr. D. R. Bhandarkar, an acknowledged authority on numismatics and epigraphy, ran the department of Ancient Indian History with striking

success and trained a band of historians who have won recognition all over India. Dr. H. C. Roy Chaudhuri's *Early Vaishnava Sects* and *Political History of Ancient India* are two outstanding samples of original work. Dr. Benimadhab Barua, a great Pali scholar, initiated a new phase of Asokan scholarship while Dr. U. N. Ghoshal has enriched the study of Hindu political theories and revenue system. Dr. J. N. Banerji is a well-known authority on Indian iconography and numismatics while Dr. D. C. Sarkar is a reputed historian and epigraphist. Dr. R. G. Basak is an eminent Indologist while Dr. N. P. Chakrabarti was an archaeologist of all-India fame. Dr. Rameshchandra Majumdar, though associated with Dacca, began his career of research at Calcutta and published some of his important works on ancient Indian history and culture before 1920. So did Dr. Surendranath Sen begin his research on the Portuguese and Marathi sources of the history of late mediaeval India. Drs. R. C. Majumdar and S. N. Sen are two of our living elder historians and we live much too close in point of time to assess their work, the value of which has been admitted here and abroad. All these scholars have taught the younger generation, as they learnt themselves, that the world of critical scholarship outside would not care to accept any one's credentials unless it was induced to do so by a display of the sources from which he gathered his plumes.

A most fitting conclusion would be to end on the note struck by Tagore whose attitude and approach to history was his own. As early as 1899, he had advocated the opening of historical 'workshops' in which raw material gathered from the soil would be turned into 'productive labour'. Cramming manufactured and imported history was to him 'unproductive labour'. The best way of creating a history of our own would be to search for material from local and regional sources in the first instance. History, to Tagore, was a living thing, the embodiment of a people's effort, and therefore must include recorded and unrecorded facts and thoughts. Beliefs and practices, even legends and rituals,



have their social and cultural value. If the landlords and the Government alike threw open their private papers and archives, our history would be broad-based on the actual material condition of our people. Besides, the poet had great doubts about the propriety of using European categories in the context of Indian society where village-communities more than states have played the vital role in the evolution of culture and social polity. Tagore's own life and work was one long commentary on his refined appraisal of the ideal of Indian life which militated against the theory of nation-states leading to racialism and expansionism. That Tagore devoted years to the study of the meaning of history is borne out by the numerous essays and reviews that he wrote. His serious articles on history are eighteen in number, now collected and published by the Visvabharati as a separate book called *Itihas*. Between 1898 and 1912, he had written highly significant prefaces and introductions to contemporary publications touching Sikh, Maratha and Muslim history. These are penetrating studies, not by an academician, but by a person of sound insight and judgment. Four other articles, *Bharatvarser Itihas*, *Bharat-Itihas-Char-cha*, *Dhammapadam* and *Bharatvarser Itihaser Dhara* are further samples of his reading of Indian history and culture. It is a well-known fact that Tagore's interest in social sciences was unfailing and that he subjected all thought to historic and philosophic discipline. Again, he preferred, while stressing the peculiar features of India's culture, to link up her civilisation with universal history, man and his values being to him more important than his racial gestures or political accidents.

This our survey, based more on affinities of research than on strict chronology, has covered about a century of progress. Our writers had crossed the derivative borders and entered the precincts of real history. New material was utilised with enthusiasm, then with confidence. Sometime later perhaps, our readers would think little of such clichés as 'cultural heritage', 'continuity of Indian tradition' or 'Indian

set of values'. But to our nineteenth century writers, these were new things. For they had little first-hand knowledge of the true origins of their own history and culture beyond foreign interpretation, sometimes unwarranted. Hence they came to be guided by the fundamental impulse to know what really happened in the past, not what was supposed to have happened. A few, like Tagore, believed that their function was not only to trace back the institutions and ways of thought which had survived but also to retrieve the treasures dropped on the way and lost, which if restored would enrich civilisation. The why of it was postponed until the seventies, the flowering time of the Renaissance which fostered critical enquiry. Balance and caution came as acquaintance with source-material deepened and principles of historical reconstruction learnt and assimilated. The researches of our scholars in the past century and the present have shown that Indian culture need not be judged by or compared with Western traditions; India's history may be linked up with and has a rightful place in the story of the world; India's socio-economic and political set-up before the advent of the British did not and could not follow Western ideas of the same; the past may be dead as the men who made it, but true knowledge of the past has a special meaning for a people deprived, and that inspite of big gaps, outworn sovereignties, impact of foreign rule and its superimpositions, the main structure of Indian civilisation continues.

The trends of research can be best understood by the results indicated. Some went in for chronology and dynastic history, others specialised in select periods of political history or in studies of fine arts, coins and inscriptions. A few took up social and institutional history, but very few tackled research on the economic life of India, a theme which now engages serious scholarship in Bengal. The need for it has been long felt and the need as well for a comprehensive history of the Indian people, more interpretative than correctly dull.

## 26

### SCIENCE

*Samarendra Nath Sen*

If the nineteenth century witnessed the cultural and literary renaissance it also saw the birth of modern science in India. Science is one of the manifestations of man's intellectual efforts and seldom has it been found to be dissociated from an intellectual revival. In the great age of the sixth century B.C. in Ionia and Greece, science featured prominently in the Greek thinking; during the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries the Arab renaissance was accompanied by the Islamic absorption of the ancient Greek, Byzantine, Persian and Indian sciences; the European renaissance of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries brought about the emergence of modern science. In India during the periods of her intellectual ascendancy in the Vedic times, the Buddhist supremacy, or during the Brahminical revival, sciences and technical arts were fully cultivated. So when the impact of the West in the 19th century catalysed the Indian mind to positive thinking, the study of sciences was eagerly pursued with the result that by the turn of the century her scientists were found to be contributing significantly to the world-fund of scientific knowledge.

After the recrudescence of interest in the study of sciences in India what took place was not so much the revival of ancient learning for which the country was famous up to the twelfth century, but a bodily grafting of the contents of

the Western science as actively pursued in contemporary Europe. For, there was a vast gap between where Bhaskara in the twelfth century left off and the stage to which men like Lagrange, Laplace, Gauss, Lavoisier, Gay-Lussac and Davy were elevating science towards the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century. Moreover, there was such a complete decline of the study of sciences as developed in India that the effort of reviving it was not worth making except as a part of historical research. About the end of the 18th century William Jones offered to give stipends to any Hindu astronomer who could name in Sanskrit all the constellations which he would point out, and to any Hindu physician who could bring him all the plants mentioned in the Sanskrit books. He did not find any 'pandit' who even pretended to possess the knowledge which he asked for. Such was the depth of oblivion to which the ancient science in India had sunk about this time.

It need hardly be said that this grafting of the Western science was accomplished by the Western scholars themselves who came out to India to serve under the East India Company in various capacities—as medical men, Royal Engineers, civil and military officers. These people had the explorers' temperament of mind and became immediately interested in men and nature, geography and natural resources of the little-known sub-continent. From the ruler's point of view the East India Company were no doubt interested in this type of investigations resulting in better knowledge of the climate, the geography and geology, the flora and fauna, the tropical diseases, and of the Indian races with their diverse customs and social and religious practices. In this study, the Western method and techniques, their mathematics and scientific instruments were employed, and before long the virgin soil yielded a rich crop. Thus were laid down the foundations of our field sciences: meteorology, geography and geology, zoology, botany, medical sciences, anthropology and archaeology. The study of these various sciences here which started with the individual efforts of

a few scholarly-minded servants of the Company, working in their spare time, was further accentuated by the establishment of a number of scientific Surveys which I shall presently mention. But the greatest fillip came from the Asiatic Society founded in 1784 by Sir William Jones, a Puisne Judge of the old Supreme Court at Fort William in Bengal.

### *The Asiatic Society*

Sir William Jones was a distinguished scholar and linguist who had already studied the classics of India and wanted to engage himself in oriental researches. In order that such studies may be carried out in a systematic and organized manner, he conceived the idea of founding a society whose object would be the study of Man and Nature. "The bounds of its investigations will be the geographical limits of Asia", he said, "and within these limits its enquiries will be extended to whatever is performed by man or produced by nature". "You will investigate", Jones further clarified, "whatever is rare in the stupendous fabric of nature; will correct the geography of Asia by new observations and discoveries; will trace the annals and even traditions of those nations who, from time to time, have peopled and desolated it; and will bring to light their various forms of Governments, with their institutions, civil and religious; you will examine their improvements and methods in arithmetic and geometry—in trigonometry, mensuration, mechanics, optics, astronomy and general physics; their system of morality, grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic; their skill in chirurgery and medicine, and their advancement, whatever it may be, in anatomy and chemistry. To this you will add researches into their agriculture, manufacture and trade; and, whilst you enquire into their music, architecture, painting, and poetry, will not neglect those inferior arts, by which comforts, and even elegances of social life, are supplied and improved". It was indeed an encyclopaedic programme of research. The record of work of the Society during the last 174 years and of other learned bodies and institutions which

the Society helped and inspired to create fully justified the vision and hopes of the great founder.

It is beyond the scope of the present article to describe the creditable work of the European scientists during the whole of the 19th century, leading to the foundation of the various field sciences in India. How important that work was, both in quality and quantity, would be understood from the fact that about thirty-four of such scientists working in India were elected to the Fellowship of the Royal Society. A few notable contributions only may be mentioned here.

### *Astronomical Observations and the Trigonometrical Survey*

The early European surveyors and engineers who came out to India included a number of able mathematicians who did work of first rate importance in astronomical observations, in triangulation work, in geodetic survey and related problems. Reuben Burrow (1788-95), an excellent mathematician, determined astronomically the position of the principal places in Bengal and northern India. This work was continued by T. D. Pearse and R. H. Colebrooke. The foundation of survey by triangulation method and also of the great Trigonometrical Survey of India were due to Captain William Lambton. Lambton first conceived the idea of surveying the Peninsula of India by the triangulation method and started his measurements with only "a chain of blistered steel, five coffers, twelve pickets of three-inch diameter, hooped and shod with iron, and a levelling telescope". Later on he added to his equipments steel chains, a theodolite and a zenith sector, all obtained from England, and carried out a remarkable series of measurements for upwards of 20 years with singular zeal and enthusiasm. By 1815 he covered the whole of the Peninsula from Goa to Musulipatam, with all the interior country from Cape Comorin to the southern boundary of the Nizam's and Mahratta territories, showing the positions of all the great rivers and the great mountain ranges. When the Trigono-

metrical Survey of India was established in 1818 he was appointed its first Superintendent.

The favourable position of India for the study of geodesy, that is the measurement of the figure of the earth, was early realized. The vast stretch of land in one meridian—1700 miles from the foot of the Himalayas to Cape Comorin—and the deformation of the geoid peculiar to this part of the world led to the discovery of gravity anomalies by Capt. Basevi and others. On the basis of these anomalies, the Venerable Archdeacon Pratt of Calcutta, an accomplished mathematician, worked out his famous theory of isostatic compensation—a fundamental discovery which, as is well known, exerted a great influence on the progress of geophysics in the present century.

In 1845 Radhanath Sikdar, the head computer of the Trigonometrical Survey, determined by mathematical calculations that an obscure-looking peak in the Himalayas was actually the highest mountain in the world. Although this peak was named after Col. Everest, the Surveyor-General, during whose time the observation was made, the real credit of the determination was due to the Indian mathematician.

### *Meteorology*

Meteorological observations are known to have been recorded by Henry Trail as early as 1784 and published in the *Meteorological Journal* kept by Colonel Pearse. Other meteorological observers during the early years of the 19th century included the illustrious James Prinsep (1820-39), T. J. Boileau (1841-45) and Messrs. Schlagintweit. Prinsep kept wet-bulb readings for over 14 years without much interruption and published the results of his observations on the depressions of the wet-bulb hygrometer in 1836. Boileau prepared a complete set of Traverse Tables for the determination of the elastic force of aqueous vapour in the atmosphere and the temperature of the dew point. Messrs. Schlagint-

weit conducted a magnetic survey from 1854 to 1858. But the systematic study of meteorology and the keeping of meteorological observations started with H. F. Blanford who first joined the Geological Survey in 1855, then the Presidency College in 1861 and the Bengal Meteorological Service in 1867. In 1875 he became the Meteorological Reporter to the Government of India and it was due to his efforts that the different provincial meteorological services were consolidated under a central Meteorological Department with himself as its head. Blanford studied the irregularities of atmospheric pressure in the monsoon region, the variation of barometric tides in connection with diurnal land and sea breezes, prepared a catalogue of the recorded cyclones in the Bay of Bengal upto 1876, to quote a few from his extensive meteorological researches. The adoption of a uniform method of observation and the collection and discussion of all data at a central place, Calcutta, where arrangements were also made for the standardization of all instruments, was due to him.

### *Geology*

Geological studies in India began from about 1778 and such studies were conducted by the several surgeons of the East India Company. The most distinguished of them was H. W. Voysey (1820-23) who has often been referred to as the 'father' of Indian Geology. Voysey worked as a surgeon and geologist to the surveying party of Col. Lambton. His first contribution was on the diamond mines of Southern India in which connection he also studied the geological structures of the Nalla Mala mountains and other parts of Hyderabad. He also made important contributions to the theory of sandstone formation in India. After Voysey, Capt. J.T. Newbold of the Madras Native Infantry carried out important work in the stratigraphical geology of South India. He studied the specimens of a calcarosilicious scoria, forming a small hill near Ballari, observed the chloritic band to the north-west of Tarugiri and the clay-iron beds



near Kamdighal, discovered the remains of the iron-smelting industry in the Raichur Doab and detected the occurrence of manganese veins. J. D. Herbert, a contemporary of Newbold and also one of the pioneers of Indian geology, carried out extensive mineralogical survey of the Himalayan districts and prepared geological maps of those areas. H. Falconer was interested in the geological formation of the Sivalik Hills. In 1831 he inferred the Tertiary age of the Sivalik formation and placed it on the horizon of the *Molasse* of Switzerland. On volcanoes and earthquakes the work of R. H. Colebrooke, E. P. Halstead and R. Baird Smith, and on glacial action that of I. A. Hodgson, J. H. Batton, E. Madden and others may also be mentioned.

All these pioneering activities were slowly but surely laying the foundation of the Geological Survey of India. The Court of Directors of the East India Company became convinced of the desirability of a systematic study of the coal fields and sent out in 1845 D.H. Williams as geological surveyor. Williams explored the Raniganj, Ramgarh and Karanpura coal fields, which were to form the basis of a flourishing coal industry in the years to come, but he died prematurely of fever in 1848. The arrival in 1851 of Dr. Thomas Oldham as Superintendent, Geological Survey, opened a new chapter in Indian geology. As Director of the Geological Survey of Ireland, Oldham had established a wide reputation in Europe. In India, he examined the Rajmahal Hills and came to the important conclusion that the entire group of the coal-producing rocks of Bengal were quite distinct from the true coal measures of England. He proposed the name of 'Vindhyan' for the great sandstone formation of northern and central India, on which Voysey, Franklin, Carter and others had worked before him. His discovery of the parallelism of rocks of India and those of Australia is also important. Apart from his own investigations in Indian geology, Oldham was primarily responsible for the establishment and organization of the Geological Survey of India. When he retired in 1876 after twenty-five

years of service, he left the G. S. I. with practically its present organization and with a high scientific reputation.

### *Zoology*

Properly organized zoological research in India dates from the appointment in 1841 of Edward Blyth (1841-63) as the curator of the Museum of the Asiatic Society. Blyth's contributions were mainly on reptiles, birds and mammals. He published a *Catalogue* of Birds in the Asiatic Society's collections in 1849 and another on Mammalia in 1863. His reputation as a zoologist was such that Darwin frequently quoted him as an 'excellent authority' and Gould described him as "one of the first zoologists of his time". Blyth was succeeded by John Anderson in 1865, who in 1866, on the foundation of the Indian Museum, became its first Superintendent with the zoological and archaeological collections under his direct charge. Throughout the latter part of the 19th century, zoological research flourished under such able zoologists as Anderson, Atkinson, Moore, Wood-Mason, Alcock and others. Atkinson published a large series of notes on Rhynchota; Moore, de Niceville and Wood-Mason on Lepidoptera; Walsh on certain spiders that mimic ants and so on.

### *Beginning of Scientific Education and Research in Fundamental Sciences*

However brilliant the work of these individual European scientists in the various fields of sciences had been, that itself was inadequate for the regeneration of a spirit of scientific enquiry among the people of this country. That was not to take place until after scientific education and research in fundamental sciences, that is, physics, chemistry, physiology, mathematics and the like took deeper roots. The need for scientific education was clearly realized by Raja Ram-mohan Roy, the maker of Modern India. In a letter to Lord Amherst, he urged the Government to "employ European gentlemen of talent and education to interest the natives of

India in Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Anatomy, and other useful sciences, which the natives of Europe have carried to a degree of perfection that has raised them above the inhabitants of other parts of the world". Ram-mohan's vision and ideas were first translated into practice by the Serampore Missionaries, headed by Carey, Marshman and Ward. In 1821, the newly formed College at Serampore was able to secure the services of a young chemist by the name of John Mack who had been educated at the Edinburgh University. His was the earliest systematic attempt to teach elements of chemistry in an educational institution in India. He also wrote a book on chemistry in Bengali, which was in all probability the first of its kind on this subject in an Indian language.

The founding of the Calcutta Medical College in 1835 was another important event in the history of scientific education in this country. For many years this institution was the only place where chemistry, physics, biology and such other fundamental branches of science, in their elementary form, could be studied. Chemistry was well looked after by a band of able teachers, of whom special mention may be made of W.O' Shaughnessy. He was a great enthusiast for the teaching of chemistry, wrote manuals of chemistry for the benefit of Indian students, and was one of the few Europeans to have urged the Indians to take active interest in the chemical manufacturing industries. O'Shaughnessy was very much impressed by the aptitude of the Indian student for picking up scientific subjects and acquiring experimental skill. "He is quick of perception", said he, "patient in reflection, adroit and delicate in experimental manipulation; and with these endowments, his success in this study may be most confidently foretold". In such atmosphere and under such able teachers, Mahendralal Sircar had his medical and scientific education at the Calcutta Medical College. During the last quarter of the century we find him as one of the foremost leaders of the movement for establishment of research centres where Indian researchers could carry on

scientific investigation along modern lines. His great efforts in founding a research institute, the oldest of its type in India, will be noticed below.

Chemical education and research received a great impetus when Alexander Pedler joined the Presidency College of Calcutta in 1874 as Professor of Chemistry. Pedler had great manipulating and experimental skill and was also an excellent lecturer. His persuasive lectures contributed not a little to the popularity of the subject; the young pupils who were attracted to the subject included late Acharya Prafulla-chandra Roy, the doyen of science in modern India.

The Calcutta Medical College, the Presidency College and a few other institutions which provided facilities for instruction in scientific subjects, were primarily teaching institutions. They could hardly offer any facility for conduct of original investigations by the advanced students or by those who had finished their higher educational courses. It is at this point that Dr. Mahendralal Sircar first came out with the idea of founding a research institution with libraries and laboratories where young Indians could be offered facilities for research and instruction in science. He was encouraged in this idea by the then leading educationists and prominent citizens of Calcutta. These men not only helped Dr. Sircar with counsels but contributed handsome donations with which it was possible to found India's first non-official scientific research institution, the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science, in 1876. The history of the foundation of the Association is also the history of the rise of a scientific movement in the country, started under Indian initiative.

This Science Association was established after the example of the Royal Institution of London. The great founder of the Association worked all his life for this institution and was sustained in his efforts by the conviction that one day its humble laboratories would be able to produce a Davy and a Faraday. Although he did not live to see his dream

realized, the first quarter of the present century witnessed Raman, Krishnan and a host of others busy with their investigations in its laboratories.

It is true that the result of all these efforts were not visible before the present century. But already by the end of the 19th century we find a group of young researchers doing original research and breaking new grounds in physics, chemistry and mathematics.

Jagadishchandra Bose, a graduate from the St. Xavier's College, Calcutta, and later from the two Universities of London and Cambridge (where he came under the influence of such world-famous scientists as the late Lord Rayleigh, Francis Darwin, James Dewar and others) joined the Presidency College in 1884 as junior professor of Physics. From about 1894 Bose took to serious scientific work and soon became an acknowledged authority, first in the study of short electromagnetic radiations, and second in the study of plant physiology. In 1887, Hertz had verified Maxwell's electromagnetic theory of radiation by producing e.m. waves of 5.5 meters of wave length and demonstrating some of the optical properties of such waves. Bose further extended Hertz's work by producing very short e.m. waves, of the order of a few centimeters, and showed the reflection, refraction and polarization of such waves in a portable and elegant apparatus of his own design and construction which received wide admiration. His famous paper on *The Polarization of Electric Waves* was read before the Asiatic Society in 1895.

Bose's interest in responses in the living and the non-living was stimulated by his work with the coherer. He observed that the constant use of coherers led to a kind of fatigue from which it automatically recovered on being given a period of rest. Following Waller's dictum that the most delicate and universal sign of livingness in living tissues is electric response to stimulation, Bose started a series of investigations on the similarity of responses in the living

and the non-living. This work started a great controversy for a time, but ultimately received wide support and recognition in the scientific world, leading to his election to the Fellowship of the Royal Society of London and membership of many learned bodies abroad.

Bose's work inspired a whole generation of young scientists directly or indirectly. The great possibilities of the Indian talent in the field of original scientific investigation became immediately established and kindled new interest and enthusiasm among young talents which, in the years to come, were to blossom forth into a Saha, a Bose, a Mahalanobis and a Mitra.

If Jagadishchandra Bose led Bengal's youth in physical and plant physiological sciences, Prafullachandra Roy, another junior professor of the Presidency College who had studied chemistry in Edinburgh, championed the cause of both chemical research and chemical industries. In Edinburgh, he had worked on the analysis of double sulphate of cobalt, copper and potassium. At the Presidency College he continued his investigation on inorganic salts without equipment and research grant. In 1896 he prepared a new mercury compound, the mercurous nitrite, which was announced in the *Journal* of the Asiatic Society. In this and other related work he had excellent co-operation from a number of his inspired co-workers and students, of whom special mention may be made of Chandrabhushan Bhaduri, Jyotibhushan Bhaduri and Rasiklal Datta.

In a brief article, it is hardly possible to refer to the many-sided activities of Acharya Prafullachandra Roy who was not only the 'father of chemistry' in India, but one of the few architects of modern Bengal. He laid the foundation of chemical industries in Bengal, worked to the end of his life in trying to persuade his countrymen to take to industrial, manufacturing and business enterprise instead of swelling the rank of unfortunate clerks, and engaged himself in countless humanitarian activities.

Asutosh Mookerjee, another brilliant product of the late nineteenth century renaissance in Bengal, took the leadership in another field, namely the reorganization of university education with a view of transforming it into an institution of highest learning and research. Asutosh Mookerjee was himself a mathematician of no mean order. After a brilliant academic career, he took to mathematical research for a time and contributed original papers on differential equations to the *Journal* of the Asiatic Society which were later on incorporated in the works of Edwards and Forsyth. Like J. C. Bose and P. C. Roy before him, he was also offered a teaching position in the Presidency College under the Bengal Education Service. Had he accepted the offer, the history of the Calcutta University deprived of his leadership during the first quarter of the present century would have possibly been quite different.

Asutosh's greatest contribution to the development of scientific research in this country undoubtedly lies in his foundation of the University College of Science and Technology in 1916. His bold vision and dominating leadership was not only responsible for the conversion of the Calcutta University from an affiliating into a teaching institution, it once for all paved the way to higher study and research. The Government of his day fought shy of spending money on higher studies and research and discouraged Asutosh's efforts in many ways. Undeterred he appealed to the generous and public-spirited men of his time, and magnificent response was received from such persons as Taraknath Palit, Rashbehari Ghosh, Rani Bageswari and Kumar Guruprosad Singh of Khaira. Princely donations from benefactors enabled the University to create a series of professorships and research scholarships in Pure and Applied Physics, Pure and Applied Chemistry, Applied Mathematics, and Botany.

The University College of Science thus provided the long-awaited opportunity to a band of brilliant young men,

whose talents would have otherwise been wasted or directed to other channels, to pursue research careers. Asutosh also had a rare gift of finding the right type of talents. The Physics Departments were staffed by C. V. Raman, D. M. Bose, P. N. Ghosh, M. N. Saha, S. N. Bose, S. K. Mitra and B. B. Roy, all of whom made significant contributions in their special fields and achieved international distinction. The brunt of organizing chemical research fell to Acharya P. C. Roy, under whom P. C. Mitra, J. N. Mukherji, J. C. Ghosh, P. Roy and J. C. Bardhan, formed a brilliant group who consolidated for all time the foundation of chemical research laid by their Master.

The renaissance of the late nineteenth century thus made itself abundantly felt through the brilliant individual researches of Acharya Bose, Acharya Roy and Professor C. V. Raman who, though hailing from outside Bengal, was undoubtedly a product of this movement, and in the unique organizational abilities of Sir Asutosh Mookerjee. The task was well achieved and modern Bengal could look forward to a confident future.



## WESTERN EDUCATION

*Priya Ranjan Sen*

In the opinion of many people, not excluding scholars, India has not been slumbering through the ages: it had, nay, it still has, a fund of knowledge and wisdom which it can share with the world, knowledge and wisdom it has stored up through long centuries, without any display and fuss, and which had raised it to the status of a teacher in this part of Asia. Its progress in philosophy, art and architecture, rhetoric and medicine, is still a matter of wonder to men of our times. Into this world came the knowledge of rapid locomotion which had begun to revolutionize the world in the middle of the 18th century, preceded in its turn by the political domination of the East by the West through a concatenation of circumstances into which we need not enter here. But somehow the idea arose that the West was superior to the East; that one shelf of books on European knowledge was more than a whole library of Oriental lore; and that this superiority did not consist in material knowledge only, but also in social organization. And this idea of the superiority of the West was not limited to Westerners; it was but natural that they should have an idea of their own importance, but it extended to prominent and patriotic men among the Indians as well who strongly advocated the cause of Western education for the regeneration of India.

When the East and the West were thrown together, the two had to know each other, and an exchange of culture

was bound, in the nature of things, to take place. The ruling race was to assume the role of the leader. But the immediate need was to carry on the administration with the help of the children of the soil. After trying for a brief while to play the part of mere tax-gatherers, it had to utilise local scholars and their knowledge of local custom for coming to an understanding of the country which it had to govern. It had to educate its own personnel, and the College of Fort William, started in 1800, was the result of an effort in this line; the resultant fillip to Eastern languages had therefore nothing to do with the policy of general education, except that it made the Western approach clear to us.

There were of course schools under private management where children were taught by missionaries or individual Englishmen, but these must have been scattered and nothing was done by the East India Company. That education of the people was an essential part of governmental administration was not fully admitted by the Company; for that matter, it was only in 1870 that the Education Act was passed even by the British Parliament, formally admitting the responsibility of the Government pertaining to education. Men like Sir William Jones had already discovered that in the literature of the East there was much worthy to be known to Europeans: *Sakuntala* had been translated into English. The Directors opposed the proposal to take any initiative: "the Hindus had as good a system of faith and morals as most people and it would be madness to attempt their conversion or to give them any more learning or any other description of learning than what they already possessed." (*Selections from Educational Records*, Vol.I, p. 17.).

But the opinion of the Board of Directors did not reflect the public opinion of England, and in a little while was forced on the Board the obligation of spending a sum of not less than one lakh of rupees per year for educational purposes. The East India Company was passing through monetary difficulties and it was in urgent need of assistance from

Parliament. A member of Parliament insisted on putting in a clause: "It shall be lawful for the Governor-General in Council to direct that..... a sum of not less than one lac of rupees in each year shall be set apart and applied to the revival and improvements of literature and the encouragement of the learned natives of India and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories in India" (*Selections from Educational Records* Vol. I, p. 22). The benefaction however was barren, because there was no machinery to spend the money on the lines indicated; but when in 1823 the General Committee of Public Instruction was appointed, the revival of literature was taken up as a major item, a revival consisting in translations and publications of Oriental classics.

This however did not go without a protest. There was a positive demand by this time for Western education. The schools started by Christian missionaries prospered, in spite of hide-bound conservatism here and there. Robert May set up a school in Chinsura in 1814, and in the course of a year he had established 16 other schools in the neighbourhood. Similar schools were started in Burdwan and other districts by missionary enterprise. In the city of Calcutta, the eagerness to receive Western education was seen in the move for the establishment of the Hindu College, a move which became successful in 1817 through the energy and enthusiasm of David Hare, Rammohan Roy and Radhakanta Dev. Rammohan Roy expressed his strong dissatisfaction with the Government measure of starting a new Sanskrit School in Calcutta of a type "which existed in Europe before the time of Lord Bacon" and recommended an educational policy which would take up the teachings of "Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Anatomy and other useful sciences", "employing a few gentlemen of talent and learning educated in Europe, and providing a college furnished with necessary books, instruments and other apparatus". Vidya-sagar's ideas, expressed later, were in the same vein. Dr.

Duff was keen and active in spreading English education, though he was not satisfied with the way in which it was done—he wanted this education to be a vehicle for spreading Christianity.

In the meantime the Government wanted to come to a decision. In 1833, when the funds of the General Committee were increased by an Act of Parliament from 1 lakh to 10 lakhs of rupees per year as a minimum fund to be spent on education, the question could no longer be neglected: what was the type of education which was to be imparted? Was it to be in the old groove or a new groove? The medium of instruction stood for the type of education which was to be imparted, though it is not easy to realise how the question could ultimately resolve itself like that. Was the education to be given through the English language or Persian and Sanskrit? The case of the modern Indian languages was not given the hearing which it deserved.

Macaulay had come out to India in 1834 as Legislative Member of the Supreme Council. He was the President of the General Committee, and on being asked by Bentinck, the then Governor-General, he wrote a minute on the subject in 1835, whole-heartedly supporting the Anglicist viewpoint.

Thereupon a resolution was framed in favour of spending the funds appropriated for the purpose of education on English education alone, the Government favouring education in the sense of promotion of European education in literature and science among the natives of India. Macaulay declared in his characteristic style: "What Greek and Latin were to the contemporaries of More and Ascham our tongue is to the people of India. The literature of England is now more valuable than that of classical antiquity". Bentinck's Government drafted its resolution in 1835 accordingly: "The great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science amongst the natives of India". All funds available for the purposes

of education were to be employed on English education alone. All stipends were to be stopped henceforth for Sanskrit and Arabic institutions and "no funds were to be spent on printing Oriental Works".

In spite of the Minute of Lord Macaulay and the Resolution of the Government of Lord William Bentinck just referred to, the cause of Western education did not prosper. It could not, for mere recommendations or declarations and resolutions are of no avail until an executive machinery is created. Wood's Despatch, "the intellectual charter of India", provided that machinery (1854). It created an Education Department, started a high school in each district, provided for a system of inspection and grants-in-aid to educational institutions founded by benevolent persons for the spread of English education. Wood's Despatch convinced the Directors that the time had come when universities could be established in India, modelled on London University. In 1857 the necessary Act was passed by the legislature and universities were set up at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, the first more or less unrestricted in its jurisdiction, the other two confined to their respective presidencies. The effect of university education was seen in the tendency to level intellectual culture to one uniform standard, in the extensive Westernisation of the educated community. In course of the next 25 years, the number of colleges rose from 27 to 75, and in those days such an increase was of great importance, more than is indicated by mere number.

As the new system of education rolled on, the void that it left nevertheless was more and more visible. Other centres of higher education were necessary; education should not mean examination only; it should include teaching also, and so on. Other clouds were visible on the horizon even before the 20th century. The very fact that this Western education was capable only of providing employment through service, under the Government mainly, was a limitation which was soon found out. The graduates of the University

were not, in spite of the Western education they had received, capable of earning their bread. The over-literary character of the instruction given was being sharply criticised; the absence of moral if not religious outlook was seriously condemned; and the urgent need of provision for technical studies so that there could be industrial development throughout the country emphasised. Sir Gurudas Banerji was prominent in such criticism and it found a larger voice and a strength of expression when in the beginning of the 20th century the Governmental attempts at university reform were held suspect of a political purpose. The cry was that the Government was attempting to stifle higher education.

One constructive attempt out of the welter of political unrest was the formation of a National Council of Education which tried to start classes both for literary studies and also for technological studies, a national council of education inspired by Satishchandra Mukherji and others. This was an attempt in the right direction. But it could not immediately succeed. There were handicaps too serious to overcome, both financial and political, and there was the genius of Sir Ashutosh who tried to re-organise the University of Calcutta which he dominated for a long time and which his spirit dominated even after his death. The Calcutta University stood for comparative autonomy, freedom from State control as far as was possible, emphasis on the study of the mother tongue in an attempt to nationalise education without allowing it to be diverted into a political channel.

In 1917 a new era ushered in so far as educational work was concerned, not only for Bengal but also throughout India. The Sadler Commission came and visited different colleges and universities and came to certain conclusions. Sir Ashutosh was a member of the Commission and as a matter of fact many of its findings were his personal contribution. It led to a fresh start of the universities, establishment of more universities; from 1917 to 1947 runs a new

period of university administration, a chapter in Western education progressive in outlook and more or less of the same pattern throughout the country.

From the folds of the Indian National Congress came yet another cry for a national system of education. This was Mahatma Gandhi's Wardha Scheme which aimed at certain basic fundamentals to be observed. Craft work and correlation, a social sense, emphasis on character-building, these are the corner stones of basic education, a national system as against Western education. Though more than ten years have passed since its introduction, it has yet to establish itself. It is not antagonistic towards Western education. It has to depend on craft work, to move also in a line with Professor Dewey's educational philosophy, to recognise the importance of social studies. In short it is in consonance with the progressive ideas which are being experimented upon and followed in the States and elsewhere.

Thus we see that the movement of Western education can be well specified as marching ahead after regular intervals, as if there were a plan behind it after all. 1813 is the year in which the first educational grant was made by the East India Company; in 1823 was appointed the General Committee of Public Instruction; in 1835 Lord Macaulay was busy recording his minute; in 1854 Major Wood was ready with his momentous despatch, laying down his plan of having a network of educational centres with the 3 Universities guiding them. It was from 1854 that the flood-gates were opened and throughout the length and breadth of India there was a uniformity of syllabuses and a uniformity of courses, and almost the same standard of examination. In 25 years' time i.e. in 1882, people woke up to the need of university reforms, a need which has not yet been fully met. Then the University Act of 1904, followed by the Sadler Commission in 1917, followed in its turn by the National Educational Reconstruction Movement at Wardha—does it not seem to have worked according to a definite plan?

Of the many influences, which have combined to create the unity of the Indian nation out of its pronounced diversities, Western education is not the least. We may with considerable 'justice on our side find fault with it; we may criticise it and say that it has been a denationalising element in the scheme of things; yet we have to admit that many of us had to learn our nationalism through English language and we have been welded into a nation through Western education. After all, it is not a paradox to hold that one has to lose one's soul to get it. It has been a poison, if you like to put it like that, but a poison that has kept us alive. Lala Lajpat Rai, Balgangadhar Tilak, Bipinchandra Pal—photographed as they were together and placed before the people's eye—had their different ways of doing things no doubt, but their reaction to events of national importance was the same. Bipinchandra Pal's fiery eloquence stirred the nation to its depths. He was a thorough-going critic of the West but at the same time he was a product of the West, and who will deny that some of his success was due to the control over the foreign medium which he acquired so well? But in his heart of hearts he was a Vaishnav, as his wonderful essays show him to be beyond the shadow of a doubt.

It is interesting to observe that the influence of the United States of America is being gradually felt more and more in the sphere of Indian Education today. Professor Dewey had experimented on education as early as the nineties in Chicago and with Sister Nivedita it was a very good and profitable experiment which she had tried to apply to her school at Baghbazar. Later on, the importance of hard work was recognised more and more and in the basic system of education we find that the process of education being conducted through craft work is in line with it. Of course much of the American thought is now world thought, not to be labelled Western, but to be recognised as of universal importance. But since the attainment of our independence there has been more and more of American influence, not only in the matter of extension work, not only in the idea



of extension or assessment and evaluation of our teaching in the classes in schools and colleges, but also in the general pattern of our College and University system; everywhere we find preferential adoption of the American methods even to the neglect of European methods. London for us is receding into the background. There is something to be said for the method of English education, after all, which still calls for adoption but the prevailing tendency is towards the American methods. We need not sit immediately in judgment now, but we may watch with interest the gradual drift of the country. The forward programme or the conservative programme, the old world method or the new world method, which is to give the lead to Indian education in future remains to be seen but the lead is already being given by such large-hearted co-operation as comes from T. C. M. and other organisations which are not confining their attention merely to India but to other countries in South-East Asia and even to the dark corners of Africa, so that the whole world may march hand in hand towards light and more light—a very tempting ideal and at the same time a very interesting virgin field for sociological and educational study.

But the achievements of Soviet Russia embodied not only in the Sputnik but also in extensive education of the people also loom large before us. How could Soviet Russia do so much in so little time? Can we not do the same thing? We may differ in our political ideology and yet follow the same technique. As there has been a stream of students and teachers in recent years going to the States, not necessarily to qualify for jobs but to gather ideas and acquire skills, so there may be pilgrims visiting Moscow for the same purpose in years to come: the movement has already begun.

It is specially important for India also to hold on to her own self, to be true to her own self. Since the Swadeshi days we had sent our men to Japan and other countries to learn the secret of a successful cottage industry and other secrets; how much benefit has the nation received? Specially in

education, above other things, it is the unfoldment of one's personality that matters. It would be best to end with a citation from Panikkar's—a chance citation but one which will fully express our idea—in a book written by him about 40 years ago: "We must guard ourselves against any attempt at educational uniformity throughout India. There is wide room in India for a diversity of ideals, methods and institutions and we need not copy from any single European country, when the field is so wide and opportunities are so great". And let us not forget Rabindranath's objection to placing foreign educational ideals before us: "What I object to is the artificial arrangement by which foreign education tends to occupy all the space of our national mind, and thus kills, or hampers, the great opportunity for the creation of a new thought-power by a new combination of truths" (*An Eastern University*).

## 28

### ATTEMPTS AT NATIONAL EDUCATION

(1905-1906)

*Uma Mukherjee and Haridas Mukherjee*

Since the 'nineties of the last century the clamour for National Education was gradually being raised in our country. The need for National Education was the outcome of a deep sense of many-sided defects in the prevalent system of English education. The system of Western education as introduced and developed in this country under the auspices of the British rule was defective because of "its calculated poverty and insufficiency, its anti-national character, its subordination to Government and the use made of that subordination for the discouragement of patriotism and the inculcation of loyalty".<sup>1</sup> It helped us neither to grow as a modern intellectual people nor enabled us to develop our material resources nor did it fit us quite well in the struggle for existence. The bread-problem became keener and keener every year, and even higher University education provided no guarantee for livelihood to the Indian youth who even after he had "sweated himself and his family through the whole course of higher education" frequently looked in vain for "employment at Rs. 30 (£ 2) or even at Rs. 20 a month".<sup>2</sup>

This disquieting aspect of the situation did not escape the notice even of the Government. It received a pointed

mention in the Convocation Speech of Lord Lansdowne in 1889, and a decade later Lord Curzon spoke on it in stronger terms when he said: "The Indian Universities turn out only a discontented horde of office-seekers, whom we have educated for places which are not in existence for them to fill"<sup>3</sup>. In the same speech he pointed out what a world of difference existed between "a residential and teaching University such as Oxford and Cambridge" and "an examining and degree-giving University" as Calcutta. He observed further that the Indian Universities even as examining bodies were not properly built up. Curriculum was defective and this defective curriculum did not inspire in the pupils anything higher "than the hungry appetite for diploma", which "sacrificed the formation of character upon the altar of cram" and which turned the recipient into "a sort of phonographic automaton".

The next charge that was levelled against the prevalent system of English education was that it was a foreign product, divorced from the living realities of the Indian world which was "as far removed as the poles asunder from the Western world" in temperament and genius. It was un-national or denational in outlook, character and consequences. The effect of such enforced, alien culture was the growth, as Curzon put it, of a "half-denationalised type of humanity who has lost the virtues of his own system, while only assimilating the vices of another." In his Convocation Speech delivered on 17 February 1900, Lord Curzon dwelt upon the drawbacks of the Indian educational system and observed in part thus: "We teach you in your Indian Colleges, and we examine you in the Indian Universities upon subjects not merely conveyed to you in a foreign language, but representing foreign ideas and modes of thought. They are like an aerolite discharged into space from a distant planet, or like exotic plants imported from some antipodean clime".<sup>4</sup> If the object of education is to mould its recipient into "a higher moral and intellectual type" or to transform him into "a finer specimen of a man",

the Indian University education was then a huge failure. And these observations were made by none other than Lord Curzon in 1900 in his capacity as the Chancellor of the Calcutta University.

Thus on various grounds, discontent against the prevailing type of education was growing in our country towards the close of the nineteenth century. This intellectual awareness, coming as it did in the wake of an awakened national consciousness in the 'nineties, made us impatient for reform. The cry for National Education which may be tentatively defined "as the education which starting with the past and making full use of the present builds up a great nation"<sup>5</sup> was raised more insistently in the country and the new spirit found its powerful protagonists in men like Gurudas Banerji, Rabindranath Tagore and Satischandra Mukherji. Among the foreigners nobody played a greater role in directing our aspirations for National Education than Mrs. Annie Besant, Sir George Birdwood and Sister Nivedita who were the sincerest well-wishers of India at the end of the last century.

The aspiration for National Education received a new impetus in the background of the work and investigation of the Indian Universities Commission of 1902. When the Commission's Report and Recommendations together with the Note of Dissent by Gurudas were published in June 1902, there was a storm of protest and indignation in the country at the proposed effective official control over education and the intended curtailment of the control by the popular element. Satischandra Mukherji, the Editor of the *Dawn*, offered at that time the most uncompromising criticism on the Government's educational policy. He not merely offered a theoretical criticism, but also took a practical step for the proper training of youths and founded a special institution aptly named the Dawn Society (July 1902). It soon became a nursery of patriotism and functioned as a dynamic centre of culture and nationalism for a

number of years (1902-07). It holds a unique place in the history of our national awakening<sup>6</sup>.

Its life and soul was Satischandra Mukherji of revered memory. A patriotic and self-sacrificing soul, his idealism drew round him many brilliant youngmen of that time, and nothing was dearer to that idealist-patriot than a proper education of the youngmen. In the hectic days of the Swadeshi Movement when the demand for National Education was raised as a battle-cry as an important expression of the national struggle for independence, it was Satischandra who played the most valuable role in giving a lead and direction to it and organised the movement for National Education into a concrete reality. In fact, it was his students of the Dawn Society who started the agitation for the boycott of the Calcutta University and educational autarchy even before the repressive Carlyle Circular was issued and published. The pioneering role of Rabindranarayan Ghosh, Nripendrachandra Banerji and Radhakumud Mookerji in the matter of educational boycott, under the leadership of Satischandra Mukherji and Hirendranath Datta, is now a forgotten reality. These lieutenants of Satischandra, who were to sit for the impending M.A. and P.R.S. examinations to be held in the month of November 1905, raised the cry for educational boycott as early as September-October of that year. That cry became a general movement after the publication of the Carlyle Circular (22 October 1905) or more correctly after the Rangpur impasse (3 November 1905) or the foundation of the Anti-Circular Society in Calcutta (4 November 1905)<sup>7</sup>.

The Anti-Partition agitation that was going on in the country since December 1903 reached a very critical stage after 7 August 1905 when the Boycott Resolution was promulgated in all solemnity in the historic Town Hall Meeting. The formal promulgation of the Boycott Resolution galvanised the national sentiments into vigorous channels. It gave a definite direction to the wandering pat-

riotic passions and supplied the nation with a potent political weapon to bring the bureaucracy and the despots to their senses. It carried a message to the people and a warning to the Government. It was an expression of Bengal's militant nationalism. It was a war-cry with the people and reflected in a remarkable manner popular sentiments in the matter of Partition.

After the Town Hall Meeting of 7 August, not only industrial strikes were organised to embarrass the Government but also the picketting system was introduced by and by to dissuade the customers from purchasing British goods. Religious idealism was also introduced into the scene, and the services of the Pandits and itinerant *Sadhus* were requisitioned to foment anti-British feeling and the Swadeshi movement which assumed before long an all-India character, as repeatedly revealed in the *I. B. Records* of the Government of Bengal and that of Eastern Bengal and Assam of those by-gone days.

The surprising rapidity with which the Swadeshi Movement progressed in the country showed the volume, intensity and spontaneity of the national resistance to the tyranny of the Government. Villages and towns throughout this province and beyond vied with each other in making their contributions to the general movement. Its impact on the students and the youthful votaries was the most powerful conceivable. In fact, the entire student community of Bengal was caught in the mighty grip of that movement in those days and it was they who really carried its messages from door to door. The revolutionary urge of the time expressed itself in a four-fold Boycott—boycott of British goods, British schools, British courts and British executive administration. On its positive side, the new spirit wanted to promote indigenous industries, to set up national schools and colleges, to establish arbitration courts and to win *Swaraj* for India which meant the entire removal of foreign rule from the country. The Government took alarm and proceeded to

stem the tide of the national upsurge by repressive measures. The first repressive step taken by the Government was the notorious Carlyle Circular—Circular No. 1679 P. D.—dated Darjeeling, 10 October 1905, which was secretly issued to the Magistrates and Collectors by R. W. Carlyle, officiating Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, prohibiting students' participation in political meetings, particularly boycott or Swadeshi meetings or picketting, and providing rigorous penal measures of discipline.<sup>8</sup> This was followed by many other repressive circulars.

The publication of the Carlyle Circular as an embodiment of the Government's policy of repression drew upon itself concentrated attacks both from the Indian press and platform. While the Indian journals like the *Sanjivani*, the *Sandhya*, the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, the *Hitavadi*, and the *New India* carried on their denunciation of the Circular, meeting after meeting was held at the same time in Calcutta in quick succession.

On 24 October 1905 a largely attended public meeting was held at the Field and Academy Club (at 16, Cornwallis Street just opposite to the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj), presided over by Barrister Abdul Rasul. The speakers included Bipinchandra Pal, Jnanendranath Roy and Shyamsundar Chakravarti who severely criticised on the one hand the derogatory Government Circular, and pleaded, on the other hand, for the establishment of an independent system of National Education.<sup>9</sup> On the same day was held another crowded meeting at the College Square by about two thousand Muslims under the presidentship of Moulvi Wazed Hossain. The speakers included Moulvi Leakat Hossain, Dr. Abdul Gafur, Md. Ibrahim Hossain, Manoranjan Guha Thakurta and Premtosh Basu. The solemn vow of the Swadeshi movement was taken by the Muslim audience<sup>10</sup>.

This was followed by a general meeting on October 27 at the residence of Charuchandra Mallick, Pataldanga, with Rabindranath Tagore in the chair and attended by



such distinguished men as Bhupendranath Basu, Krishnakumar Mitra, Satischandra Mukherji, Bipinchandra Pal, Manoranjan Guha Thakurta and others. About one thousand students, hailing from different colleges, thronged at the aforesaid meeting where the students led by Sachindra-prasad Basu (a Fourth Year student of the City College) took the decision not to bow down to the threats of the Carlyle Circular and to continue their work manfully for the country's cause. Rabindranath spoke eloquently against the damaging circular issued by the Government and expressed his whole-hearted support for the stand taken by the student community<sup>11</sup>.

While things shaped themselves thus in Calcutta, a crisis developed in Rangpur. Under instructions from T. Emerson, the local Magistrate, the Headmaster of the Rangpur Zilla School, A. K. Ghosh, issued at the end of October 1905 a circular by which he prohibited the students from "participation in boycotting, picketting and other abuses", on pain of severe disciplinary action<sup>12</sup>. Eighty-six students of the Rangpur Zilla School and fifty-six students of the local Technical School were fined each Rs. 5/- for their participation in Swadeshi meetings and shoutings of *Bande Mataram*. The guardians seeing no fault of their wards refused to pay the fines and allow their boys to attend the schools. Thus an open conflict with the authorities commenced. On November 7, the citizens of Rangpur led by Umeschandra Gupta, the leader of the local bar, assembled at a public conference and resolved on taking education of their boys into their own hands as well as starting a national institution on national lines. The outcome of their decision was the Rangpur National School which was set up on 8 November 1905 exclusively under national control. It became the symbol of successful Swadeshi in those fateful days. It was the first progeny of the National Education movement. The courageous lead that Rangpur gave in the sphere of educational independence was a land-mark in our

national history. By firing the first shot against the bureaucracy, the people of Rangpur at once earned the distinction of a pioneering stand in Freedom's battle.

While events moved fast at Rangpur and in the *mofussil*, the students and leaders in the metropolis were busy in organising a boycott of the Government-controlled Calcutta University and establishing a central institution—a National University—under exclusive national control for the realisation of the national destiny. Meeting after meeting continued to be held with this double purpose. The College Square, the *Panti's Math* (where the Vidyasagar College Hostel now stands) and the Dawn Society (located in the Metropolitan Institution or the present Vidyasagar College) became the sanctified centres of the Swadeshi spirit. At a meeting in the College Square presided over by Nareschandra Sen Gupta, the Anti-Circular Society was forged on 4 November 1905 to fight the infamous Carlyle Circular. Its youthful members led by Sachindraprasad Basu and Ramakanta Roy acted like sentinels in those fateful days and played a remarkable role in feeding the fire of Swadeshi in industry and education. While the Anti-Circular Society kept alive by sustained propagandism the urge for National Education, the Dawn Society led by Satischandra undertook to implement the constructive part of the programme. On November 5 was held at the Dawn Society a crowded meeting of about 2000 students addressed by Rabindranath Tagore, Satischandra Mukherji and Hiren-dranath Datta. Satischandra exhorted the students to sever all connections with the officialised University, to boycott its examinations. This was followed by that famous meeting at the *Panti's Math* on November 9 when Subodhchandra Mallick promised the gift of one lakh of rupees to the cause of National Education and at once earned the title of *Raja* from his grateful countrymen. On the very next day was announced the promised donation of rupees five lakhs to be made by a Zemindar friend of Satischandra to the National Education cause. This Zemindar friend of

Satischandra was Brojendrakishore Roychowdhury of Gouripur, Mymensingh.

This was followed by Barrister Ashutosh Chaudhuri's historic Manifesto issued on November 14, asking the men of light and leading in the country to assemble on November 16 at the Bengal Landholders' Association and to seriously discuss the educational situation before the matter took a graver turn. In the Education Conference that was thus held on November 16 a resolution was adopted to the effect: "That in the opinion of this Conference it is desirable and necessary that a National Council of Education should be at once established to organise a system of Education—Literary, Scientific and Technical—on national lines and under National control". In a subsequent conference of leaders held on 11 March 1906 the National Council of Education was established. The emergence of the N.C.E. marked the positive, constructive counterpart of Ashutosh Chaudhuri's Manifesto of 14 November 1905 regarding the boycott of the Calcutta University. Aurobindo Ghose who had recently come from Baroda to Bengal to study the political situation at first hand was present on the occasion.

While almost all the great nationalist leaders of Bengal strongly felt in their heart of hearts the utter inadequacy of the prevailing system of English education, all were not, however, in favour of a total boycott of the Calcutta University. The existing system of education was everywhere condemned as all-too academic and all-too literary. The extreme group headed by Gurudas Banerji, Satischandra Mukherji, Hirendranath Datta, Ashutosh Chaudhuri, Subodhchandra Mallick, Brojendrakishore Roychowdhury and others stood for complete autarchy in education—Literary, Scientific and Technical combined—on national lines and under national control. The moderate group headed by Taraknath Palit, Bhupendranath Basu, Nagendranath Ghosh, Nilratan Sircar, Manindrachandra Nandi and others wanted simply to supplement the all-too literary education of

the existing system by a regular arrangement for technical education alone under national management. At the time of the inauguration of the National Council (11 March 1906) the two divergent views on the system of National Education became very sharp leading to a consequent split in the nationalist camp.<sup>13</sup> On the very day (1 June 1906) when the National Council of Education (N.C.E.) was officially registered, a second organisation, rival to the N.C.E., was ushered into existence on the initiative of Taraknath Palit and others. This institution was named the Society for the Promotion of Technical Education (S. P. T. E.). In sociological analysis, the N.C.E. represented the extreme or radical aspirations of the day (1905-06), while the S. P. T. E. embodied the moderatist views of educational reform. It should be added that Rashbehari Ghosh, the President of the N.C.E., was also the President of the S. P. T. E., while many Bengali leaders were enlisted as members of both the organisations. The former set up the Bengal National College and School (14 August 1906) while the latter founded the Bengal Technical Institute (25 July 1906) in Calcutta.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike the limited programme of the S.P.T.E., the curriculum of the N. C. E. was broad-based and comprehensive. The fundamental object of the N. C. E.'s scheme of studies was the "quickenning of the national life of the people" for "the realisation of the national destiny", as Bipinchandra Pal put it. On its liberal side, the scheme as a whole sought "to train students intellectually and morally so as to mould their character according to the highest national ideals; and on its Technical side to train them so as to qualify them for developing the natural resources of the country and increasing its material wealth".<sup>15</sup> A very important feature was that it sought "to make education easy by imparting it through the medium of the learner's vernacular", such as Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, etc., English being a compulsory second language. The course of study was so arranged as to enable the students to learn in five years what they took under the Calcutta University's scheme at least

seven years to learn. This saving of time was the result of imparting education through the vernacular and of elimination from the course of study of unimportant and unnecessary details. A second feature was that arrangements were made for technical education in all classes up to the Fifth Standard of the Secondary Stage along with literary and scientific education on a compulsory basis, while provisions were made for specialisation in the Collegiate Course. The Intermediate Stage or the 6th and 7th Years of the Secondary Stage marked a transitional phase. The third feature was the systematic provision for the study of physical, natural or positive sciences along with liberal arts, culture and humanism. The fourth feature was the provision for moral and religious as well as physical education subject to certain conditions. The moral and religious education was, however, "not to include the enforcement of religious rites and practices", as was expressly stated in the *Report of the Ways and Means Committee* and in the *Memorandum of Association of the National Council*. A fifth and a most characteristic feature was the provision for researches into ancient Indian history, philosophy, economics, politics, arts and sciences as well as other aspects of culture. Equally noteworthy was the attempt to encourage the study of Hindi and Marathi languages as well as Pali, Persian and Sanskrit as sources for first-hand historical research. French and German also were to be taught as aids to the study of modern sciences and philosophy as well as European methods in the study of Indian culture. These items taken together constituted a revolutionary ideology for Young Bengal during 1905-1906 in the field of education.

To condemn such a bold and constructive programme as adopted by the National Council as implying a negation of modern science and culture and as based on a corrupt and decadent social metaphysics is to distort truth and betray lamentable ignorance of the essence of the new movement. The position taken up by Hemchandra Kanungo and Rajani Palme Dutt, respectively in their works on *Bangla Biplav*

*Pracheta* and *India Today*, is entirely fallacious and misleading. The National Council was the eldest progeny of the Swadeshi spirit and reflected in a concrete manner the radical or extremist passions and tendencies of revolutionary Bengal in the sphere of culture and education.

The National Council of Education that was organised in March 1906 set up under it in Calcutta the Bengal National College and School (August 1906), with Aurobindo Ghose as the first Principal and Satischandra Mukherji as the first executive head or Superintendent. At the Calcutta Session of the Congress (December 1906), National Education was accepted as an integral point in the Congress programme. The movement for National Education was not confined to Bengal alone, but also progressed apace in other parts of India. Lala Lajpat Rai and Balgangadhar Tilak were the two redoubtable exponents of National Education outside Bengal at that time. The National Council of Education as an embodiment of our *Swaraj* spirit remained a growing, struggling concern during the half-century that followed its inception till its original dream was in a sense materialised in the birth of the Jadavpur University (1955) bearing on it the impress of the glorious Swadeshi days.

#### NOTE

(1) Sri Aurobindo's *Doctrine of Passive Resistance* (Calcutta, 1948, p.37).

(2) V. Chirol's *Indian Unrest* (London, 1910, pp.224-25).

(3) Vide *Speeches by The Marquis of Lansdowne*, Vol.I, 1888-1891 (Calcutta, 1894, pp.34-35) and *Speeches by Lord Curzon of Kedleston*, 1898-1901 (Calcutta, 1901, pp.79-81).

(4) Vide *Speeches by Lord Curzon of Kedleston*, 1898-1901, pp.213-23.

(5) Vide Sri Aurobindo's editorial on 'A National University' in the *Bande Mataram* (Weekly Edition, 1 March 1908).

(6) An authoritative account of the role of the Dawn Society in our national awakening will be found in *Benoy Sarkar's Baithake* (Calcutta, 1942) and in our joint-work, viz. *The Origins of the National Education Movement* (Calcutta, 1957, Part Two).

(7) Vide the *Sanjivani* (9 November 1905, p.2) and the *Annual Report of the Anti-Circular Society* as published in the *Bengalee*, 8 November 1906.

(8) Vide our joint-work on *India's Fight for Freedom* (Calcutta, 1958, Chap.III) for a detailed account of governmental repressions in the Swadeshi days. *I.B. Records*, West Bengal, L.No.476/193 may also be consulted with advantage.

(9) The *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 25 October 1905 and *Bengal Abstract* No. 46 of 1905.

(10) The *Sanjivani*, 26 October 1905. Vide our papers in the *Hindusthan Standard* (Puja Annual, 1957) and *Mandira* (Puja Number, 1957) for a fuller account of the Muslim role in the Swadeshi Movement.

(11) The *Sanjivani*, 2 November 1905 and the *Bhandar*, December 1905.

(12) Vide the leader on 'The Rangpur Students' Case' as published in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* on 10 November 1905 for a detailed account of the circumstances leading up to the foundation of the first National School at Rangpur.

(13) Vide *The Dawn and Dawn Society's Magazine*, October 1909, Part III.

(14) *Ibid.*

(15) Vide N.C.E.'s *Calendar* for 1906-1908 (pp. 80-81) or Dr. Gurudas Banerji's speech at the Town Hall meeting on 14 August 1906, as incorporated in the *Calendar* (Appendix B, pp.11-12).

(16) Vide our joint-work on *The Origins of the National Education Movement* (Jadavpur University, 1957) for a comprehensive treatment of the subject matter. Also see our works on *Bande Mataram and Indian Nationalism* (Calcutta, 1957) and *The Growth of Nationalism in India, 1857-1905* (Calcutta, 1957) for an analysis of the forces working in the background of the National Education Movement in India.

## THE NEWSPAPER PRESS

*Sukumar Mitra*

"The free press, introduced for the first time into Asiatic Society, and managed principally by the common offspring of Hindus and Europeans, is a new and powerful agent of reconstruction". (Karl Marx).

One may trace the origin of the Indian Press in the Newsletters written by the *Waki'ahnawis* or news-writers appointed by the Emperor during the Mughal period, but the powerful 'Fourth Estate' as the indispensable adjunct of a democratic society began to develop only with the advent of British power in India. Capitalism ushered a new era in world civilization. The feudal regime fought tenaciously and savagely against the rising 'middle class' but could not hold the ground. During this struggle the modern press came into existence in England as a powerful instrument in the hands of the rising bourgeoisie.

In 1641 Star Chamber was abolished and the Press was freed in England. John Milton wrote *Arcopagitica* claiming the right of liberty of expression in print.

Give me the liberty to know, to  
Utter and to argue,  
Freely according to conscience,  
above all liberties.



These famous lines inspired the people. Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Dr. Johnson, John Wilkes, took part in journalistic activities. The first English daily, the *Daily Courant*, came into existence along with a number of magazines. The rising new 'middle class' in England gathered strength and in the process of struggling for State-power developed world-commerce and began to vie with other European competitors. The East India Company was formed and got its first charter in 1600. It was "a typical monopolist creation of the oligarchy which fixed its grip on England with the Whig Revolution".

In the meantime the Mughal power in India was disintegrating and European powers were taking the opportunity to fight and intrigue for areas of domination. The British bourgeoisie as the most advanced bourgeois power in Europe came out victorious.

With the conquest of Bengal in 1757, the East India Company began to build up its territorial power in India.

It may sound paradoxical but the period covered by the rule of the East India Company in India can aptly be described as an Age of Plunder and Destruction as well as an Age of Enlightenment. A foreign bourgeois rule forcibly superimposing itself on the old society in India smashed the germs of the rising Indian bourgeois class and thwarted the normal social development for its own benefit; but at the same time the people of India, coming into contact with a civilization stronger than their own for the first time in history, began to stir. The officials of the East India Company plundered the country not only to enrich the Company but to enrich themselves also. Soon, they began to be called Nabobs in their own country. The looters fell out among themselves and nasty quarrels and squabbles took place. Hicky, an adventurer and a man of turbulent nature, founded a journal known as *Bengal Gazette* in 1780. Hicky's paper exposed many scandals and enjoyed some popularity among the Europeans. Hicky's *Bengal Gazette* is the first

newspaper in India and with all his faults Hicky deserves to be remembered as the pioneer of the Indian Press. Hicky's paper was the faint beginning of the now powerful 'Fourth Estate' in India and the ruling clique led by Hastings became nervous. There was reason for this nervousness. The rising industrial capitalist class was raising its voice in England against the monopoly enjoyed by the mercantile capitalist class. They had their policy for India clearly defined "to make India the agricultural colony of British capitalism, supplying raw materials and buying manufactured goods".

The East India Company already came under fire in the House of Commons.

Hicky was persecuted. He lost everything but he did not surrender. Other papers, all in English, came out: the *India Gazette* (November 1780), the *Calcutta Gazette* (published by the Government), *Bengal Hurkaru* followed in quick succession. The criticisms and exposures by the independent papers aroused the anger and fear of the ruling clique. The freedom of the Press was drastically curtailed and William Duane, an Irish-American (editor and publisher of the *Indian World*), was deported from India. Charles Maclean, editor of *Bengal Hurkaru*, was arrested and brutally man-handled and ultimately deported to England. But he continued his fight in his own country which eventually led to the resignation of Lord Wellesley in 1805.

Lord Hastings abolished the censorship and followed a relatively liberal policy regarding the Press, but vigilance was not relaxed. James Silk-Buckingham, the editor of the *Calcutta Journal* founded by him in 1818, took advantage of the liberal opinions of Lord Hastings and commented boldly on public measures. John Adam, a senior member of council, did not agree with Lord Hastings and, when he took over the administration from Lord Hastings after his resignation on 1 January 1823, he required every printer of a newspaper to take out a licence. When that measure failed he deported Buckingham.

The revengeful attitude of the authorities against Buckingham should not surprise us if we remember that Buckingham was a close friend of Raja Rammohan Roy and a man of democratic leanings. Even after his deportation Buckingham kept his journalistic activities alive and started another paper, the *Oriental Herald*, in which he relentlessly continued the exposure of the administration in India. Buckingham's paper, the *Calcutta Journal*, was the best edited newspaper of that period and was extremely popular. Within the space of three years this bi-weekly paper developed into the first daily newspaper of India. C. J. Fair, the editor of the *Bombay Gazette*, was the last European to be deported from India for journalistic activities.

Thus ended the first phase of the Indian Press. With the end of the first phase we may rightly conclude that "the Indian Press was created by those who, for various reasons, were dissatisfied with the Company's administration and monopoly" (*The Indian Press*—Margarita Burus,—Introduction).

## 2

During the second decade of the 19th century Indian language newspapers began to be published. The rising intelligentsia of Bengal were coming into their own. Raja Rammohan Roy took the lead. The missionaries of Serampore did excellent work on the educational, cultural and social field by publishing both English and Bengali journals and a number of books in Indian language, but they were too ardent as missionaries to give up their religious activities. "If they were curious about the civilization of India and explored it persistently it was only with the desire to Christianize the country" (*A Brief History of 'Statesman'*). They did not hesitate to denounce the social habits and customs of India which they considered unacceptable. The missionaries founded the *Friend of India* in April 1817 and William Carey was the first editor. They started the *Dig-Durshan*, a monthly magazine in Bengali, and the *Samachar Darpan*,

a Bengali weekly in 1818. The activities of the foreign missionaries roused the nationalistic feelings of the rising educated middle class of Bengal. Reaction was sharp. Sivaprasad Sharma (*alias* of Rammohan Roy) started the *Brahmanical Magazine* or *Brahman Sebadhi* (a bilingual magazine) in 1821 in which he criticised the unjust attack on Hinduism by the missionaries. *Sambad Kaumudi*, a Bengali weekly, was founded by Tarachand Datta. It was edited by Bhabanicharan Bandopadhyay. Rammohan Roy contributed to this paper. This paper was subsequently taken over by Rammohan Roy, who also founded and edited the *Mirat-ul-Akhbar*, a Persian weekly, first published on 12 April 1822.

These three papers, especially the last, put up an united front of both conservative and progressive Indians against the propaganda of the missionaries. The ruling class became nervous. William Butterworth Bayley, a member of the Governor-General's Council, submitted a lengthy minute on 10 October 1822 in which he concentrated his main attack against the *Mirat-ul-Akhbar*. Bayley expressed his opinion about the Press in India rather frankly. He wrote: "The liberty of the Press, however essential to the native of a free State, is not in my judgement, consistent with the character of our institutions in this country, with the extraordinary nature of their interests".

When Lord Hastings resigned, Adam, as officiating Governor-General, passed his draconian regulation to control the Press. This regulation drew a clear distinction between the two sections of the press, Anglo-Indian and Indian. Rammohan Roy's *Mirat-ul-Akhbar* was the first victim of this Regulation. Rammohan refused to accept the humiliating conditions of the new Regulation and closed down his paper, writing a memorable editorial in the last number of *Mirat-ul-Akhbar* (4 April 1823) in which he quoted a couplet full of vigour and courage. It says: The honour that has been purchased at the cost of a hundred

drops of blood of the heart, Oh Sire, do not sell that honour to the door-keeper for hoping to get favour.

Times were changing. The spirit of resurgence was in the air. The demand for social reforms and Western education was growing insistent. But the ruling class continued to follow a most reactionary policy. The conservative Hindus soon broke away from the progressive Indians led by Rammohan Roy. The Anglo-Indian Press (excepting the liberal papers like Buckingham's *Calcutta Journal* and William Adam's *Calcutta Chronicle*) and the papers run by the orthodox Hindus were favoured by the authorities. The Government did not want the Indian customs denounced. They feared that public feeling would be aroused by such actions. They also wanted to keep the people in ignorance. That was why they were against all papers which took a progressive stand. So much so, that sometimes when even the *Friend of India*, run by the missionaries, "had been unusually outspoken, attempts were made to induce the Danish Government to suppress the paper and expel the missionaries" (*A Brief History of 'Statesman'*).

Lord Bentinck understood the situation and took a liberal attitude, but he was hesitant. It was Sir Charles Metcalfe who took the bold step of repealing Adam's Regulation when he became the Governor-General. The Bombay Press Regulations of 1827 were also repealed. A new liberal Act came into force.

The educated middle class of India availed of this opportunity fully and a number of weekly and monthly papers were brought out in Indian languages in several provinces of India. Some of the papers were bilingual. The progressives and the conservatives were fighting among themselves on the issue of social reforms but political consciousness was developing rapidly and in Bengal different sections of the educated middle class including the landlords united on the platform of British Indian Association

(1851). On behalf of this association a petition containing certain demands was placed before the British Parliament. There was a furore among the Englishmen in India.

The Indian Press was maturing. Within three years of its publication, *Sambad Prabhakar*, edited by the well-known poet Iswarchandra Gupta, came out as a daily paper on 14 June 1839. *Sambad Prabhakar* is the first Indian vernacular daily run by the Indians.

In the meantime discontent spread throughout India against the misrule of the East India Company. There was a deep rumbling of terrible volcanic eruption but the Government paid no heed to it. A number of factors combined brought about the Great Rebellion of 1857. The Rebellion shook the very foundation of the foreign Government in India. The discontent of the Indians was voiced at the time in several papers but the ruling class remained deaf. The Rev. J. Long writes in his 1859 report : "The opinions of the Native Press may often be regarded as the safety valve which gives warning of danger, thus had the Delhi Native Newspapers of January, 1857 been consulted by European functionaries, they would have seen in them how the Natives were ripe for revolt and were expecting aid from Persia and Russia".

The Great Rebellion created a consternation among the British ruling class and, although the educated middle class in India did not support the rebels or take part in the rebellion, the Press was gagged again. Thus ended the pre-Mutiny period of the Indian Press.

3

The Great Rebellion of 1857 was crushed and the Europeans took terrible retribution. Thousands of people were massacred, a large tract of land laid waste and the country groaned. Even the educated middle class which had not supported the rebels was forced to protest against the brutalities perpetrated by the Englishmen.

The European Press cried for vengeance and worked up the feelings of the Europeans. In introducing the repressive Act of June 1857, Lord Canning said : "I doubt whether it is fully understood or known to what an audacious extent sedition has been poured into the hearts of the native population of India within the last few weeks under the guise of intelligence supplied to them by the native newspapers. It has been done sedulously, cleverly, artfully.....I am glad to give credit to the conductors of the European Press for the loyalty and intelligence which mark their labours ....." Of course, the Act itself did not make any distinction between publications in English and in the Indian languages.

Many Indian papers, like the *Samachar Sudhabarshan* (Hindi-Bengali weekly of Calcutta), the *Durbin* (a Persian weekly in Calcutta), the *Sultan-ul-Akbar* were charged before the Supreme Court with publishing seditious libels. The press of *Gulshan-i-nau-bahar* was seized and the paper ceased publication. Many of the Urdu papers published in Northern India ceased publication when the Mutiny began.

Lord Canning was a statesman and administrator of no mean order. Realising the magnitude of the discontent prevailing in the country he proceeded carefully. The Europeans were dissatisfied with his moderate policy, but he paid no heed to their agitation. In the meantime the industrial capitalist class came out victorious in their struggle against the merchant capitalist class in Britain and the Government of India passed from the East India Company to the Crown. Lord Canning as the first Viceroy of India showed tact and firmness. The public confidence was restored. A new type of constitutional democratic movement began to take shape. In Bengal a number of newspapers (mainly weeklies) came out.

*Tattvabodhini Patrika* (1843-1902) founded by Maharshi Debendranath Tagore had played an important part in the development of the liberal press in Bengal. *Hindu Patriot*

(originally known as *Bengal Recorder*, founded by Girischandra Ghosh in 1849) under the able editorship of Harischandra Mukherjee soon developed into a powerful organ of the educated middle class. Pandit Iswarchandra Vidyasagar took the initiative in starting *Somprakash* (a weekly published on 15 November 1858) under the editorship of Dwarkanath Vidyabhushan. *Somprakash* championed the cause of the poor *ryots* and came out boldly against the landlords, indigo planters and the tea planters. *Indian Mirror*, an English fortnightly, was founded by Manmohan Ghosh in August 1861. *Indian Mirror* developed into an influential daily under the guidance of Keshabchandra Sen who also started *Sulabh Samachar*, a pice newspaper in Bengali which was a great success. *Bengalee*, an English weekly, was founded by Girischandra Ghosh in 1868 and *Amrita Bazar Patrika* was started as a Bengali weekly in the home-village of Sisirkumar Ghosh in the same year. Harischandra Mukherjee wielded his powerful pen against the atrocities committed by the Englishmen against the vanquished rebels and the people. The Europeans were indignant.

Before the echo of the last shot fired in the Great Rebellion died down, the peasants in Bengal rose against the oppression of the European indigo planters. The educated middle class took the lead and for the first time the Indian Press went into attack against foreign oppression and domination. The famous *Nil Darpan* case created a sensation. Harischandra Mukherjee, "a terror to the bureaucracy as well as to the white colonists and planters in Bengal", was persecuted. Justice Sir Mordant Wells made a vile comment against the entire Bengali people during the *Nil Darpan* case. A big public meeting was held on 26 August 1861 to protest against the conduct of Sir M. Wells.

The Government retreated in the face of the powerful people's movement.



*Sadharani*, another radical weekly in Bengali, was started in October 1873 under the editorship of Akshoykumar Sarkar. According to Bipinchandra Pal, "it was at that time the most powerful organ of educated public opinion in Bengal" (*Memories of My Life and Times*).

The Government of India then forged a new weapon in the shape of the Vernacular Press Act of 1878. *Somprakash* ceased publication refusing to accept the humiliating conditions under the said Act. To save *Amrita Bazar Patrika* from the attack of the Act of 1878, Sisirkumar and Motilal transformed their bilingual paper into a full-fledged English paper overnight on 21 March 1878. A powerful agitation developed in Bengal against this undemocratic Act of 1878. Bankimchandra, already well-known to the public, had supported the Act. Sisirkumar Ghosh did not mince matters and wrote in *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (10 March 1878): "Certainly in a free country such remarks from a person of Bankim Babu's position would have brought down upon him universal condemnation, but under the pressure of a foreign Government even the truest patriot turns a traitor to his country."

Surendranath Banerjee, who after his dismissal from the Indian Civil Service, joined whole-heartedly in the movement against the undemocratic acts of the Government, took over the *Bengalee* and began his agitation in right earnest. The agitation grew in strength and the Government was forced to repeal the Vernacular Press Act in 1881.

In 1883 a contempt case was instituted against Surendranath. On 2 April 1883 a leaderette had been published in the *Bengalee* strongly criticising the action of Justice Norris who forced a *saligram* to be brought to the court, thus wounding deeply the feelings of the orthodox Hindus. Surendranath was sentenced to two months' imprisonment. An upheaval of feeling swept through Bengal. Big demonstrations were held in Calcutta. *Hartal* was observed. The students went into mourning.

Surendranath writes: "The news of my imprisonment created a profound impression not only in Calcutta, and in my own province, but throughout India" (*A Nation in Making*). Surendranath writes with pride about his imprisonment: "I claim the honour (for such I deem it) of being the first Indian of my generation who suffered imprisonment in the discharge of a public duty" (*A Nation in Making*, p. 74).

Controversy over the Ilbert Bill was already raging and very soon an all-India movement took shape. The Indian Association was established in 1876 and the first Indian National Conference was held in Calcutta in December 1883. Surendranath's tour throughout India helped the development of an all-India organisation. He persuaded Sardar Dayal Singh Majithia to start the *Tribune* which became a powerful organ of public opinion in the Punjab. The first session of the Indian National Congress was held in Bombay in 1885. This session "was closely related with the development of the Press because the founders and editors of the leading newspapers were prominent among the founders of the national organisation" (*History of Indian Journalism*—J. Natarajan—R. P. C. Part II, p. 98). *Rast Goftar* (Bombay), the *Indian Mirror* (Calcutta), the *Hindu* (Madras), the *Mahratta* (Poona), the *Kesari* (Poona), were represented.

The country was seething with discontent. The revolutionary message of Mazzini which Surendranath spread throughout the country inspired the younger generation. New leaders were coming to the fore and the old leaders began to fall back.

In Bengal, the Age of Consent Bill aroused acute controversy. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* supported the conservative sections and it was converted into a daily on 19 February 1891. The other daily, *Indian Mirror*, supported the Bill. The conflict between the conservatives and progressives became sharp and Bipinchandra Pal, who had entered public

life by that time and supported the Bill, was shot at. Fortunately, the bullet did not hit him.

*Bangabasi*, a Bengali weekly, was published under the editorship of Jogendrachandra Basu in 1881. It supported the conservative sections. A daily edition of *Bangabasi* was also run for a short time. *Bangabasi* grew into a popular paper but it began to lose its popularity when it started to attack the progressive sections, specially the Brahmo Samaj, in a vile and abusive language. *Sanjibani*, another Bengali weekly, was brought out in 1882 under the editorship of Krishnakumar Mitra as an organ of the progressive sections. Bipinchandra Pal described *Sanjibani* as a "powerful organ of liberal thought."

The controversy about social reforms could not go on for a long time. The economic and political demands claimed attention.

The discontent that was seething burst out in Bombay when most high-handed methods were pursued to combat the epidemic of plague in 1896. The people began to resist and two British officers were murdered by the terrorists at Poona. There were serious clashes between the military and the people. Blood flowed and the country's temper rose to fever heat.

Balgangadhar Tilak wrote articles criticising the Government in the *Kesari*. On a charge of incitement he was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment in 1897. Bipinchandra Pal who delivered a remarkable speech in the third session of the Indian National Congress calling for the repeal of Indian Arms Act came to be known as an extremist. Lala Lajpat Rai, Aurobindo Ghosh and others came to the fore and the break with the moderate sections inside the Congress became inevitable. The final break came in 1907 in the Surat session of the Congress. The Government took to high-handed measures to suppress the upsurge of the people and tried to gag the Press. A secret Press Committee

was appointed in 1898. In a big public meeting held at the Town Hall, Rabindranath Tagore sharply criticised the action of the Government in his memorable article *Kantharodh* which he himself read out in the meeting.

The first decade of the 20th century saw the gradual unfolding of the characteristics of finance-capitalist rule in India. The imperialists had to change their policy owing to the transformation that was taking place in world capitalism. With concessions they wanted to lure the people and with repression they wanted to crush their upsurge. "Administration and exploitation go hand in hand"—declared Lord Curzon with brutal frankness in 1905. But the Indian people were advancing to a new stage of struggle for liberation.

In response to the demand of the public, new radical papers began to come out. The proposal for partition of Bengal roused the people. Big demonstrations and meetings were held and the Swadeshi movement was launched. The terrorist organisations took shape. Bipinchandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai and Balgangadhar Tilak became all-India leaders overnight. This trio was popularly known as Lal-Bal-Pal.

*New India*, an English weekly under the editorship of Bipinchandra Pal, heralded the new era of revolutionary struggle. It wrote in 1902: "Heaven helps those who help themselves—an old saying this; but it will soon be put to a new test in this country. We have too long looked for help from the outside to work out our problems. We have always been begging and begging and begging. The Congress here and its British Committee in London are both begging institutions". *Sandhya*, a powerful evening pice daily in Bengali, was started under the editorship of Brahma-bandhab Upadhyay and Panchcowrie Banerjee in 1904 (20 November?). It roused the youngmen of Bengal to action and became very popular. *Karali* was the bi-weekly edition of *Sandhya*. *Swaraj*, a pictorial weekly, was also brought out in 1907. Under the auspices of a revolutionary

group led by Barindrakumar Ghosh, Bhupendranath Datta, Upendranath Bandopadhyay and others, the well-known revolutionary weekly *Jugantar* was published in 1906. Within a short space of one year its circulation rose to 20 thousand copies per week. The *Nabasakti*, a Bengali daily, was also started in 1906. *Bande Mataram*, an English daily, was brought out under the editorship of Aurobindo Ghosh in 1906. *Bande Mataram* was founded by Subodhchandra Mallik, Chittaranjan Das and Bipinchandra Pal. In less than a year, a weekly edition was added to the daily (2 June 1907) to convey Aurobindo's message to the whole of India. *Kesari* in Poona, the *Desha Sewak* in Nagpur and the *Kal* in Bombay as radical papers continued to publish the articles written by Tilak and S. M. Paranjpe. These writings fired the imagination of the Marathi youth. S. M. Paranjpe was the editor of the *Kal* and one of the most powerful writers in Marathi literature.

The Government became panicky and let loose the worst type of repression. Lala Lajpat Rai, Krishnakumar Mitra, Subodhchandra Mallik and many others were deported in 1907. Bhupendranath Datta was sentenced to a year's rigorous imprisonment as the editor of *Jugantar*. Brahmabandhab Upadhyay was prosecuted and accepted the entire responsibility of the publication, management and conduct of the newspaper *Sandhya*. He refused to take part in the trial declaring that he was in no way accountable to the alien rulers. He breathed his last inside the prison and became a martyr. In the same case Bipinchandra Pal was sentenced to six months' imprisonment. In Bombay, Tilak was tried in respect of two articles written by him and sentenced to six years' imprisonment in 1908. The people of Bombay rose in protest against his savage sentence and the working class for the first time in India came out in full strength and fought a barricade-fight against the police. The Government crushed the movement with leonine violence.

In the meantime Bengal had been partitioned. The educated Hindu middle class refused to accept the partition as

a *fait accompli*. The terrorist attacks on the British and Indian officials were frequent.

During this period there was a rift in the educated Muslim middle class in Bengal. One group under the leadership of Syed Abdur Rasul, Sir Abdul Halim etc. opposed the partition and another group under the leadership of Nawab Khaza Salimulla, Nawab Ali Chowdhury etc. supported it. There were only two Bengali fortnightlies, *Mihir* and *Sudhakar*, run by the Bengali Muslims. The papers were amalgamated and transformed into a weekly and began to be published as *Mihir O Sudhakar*. After the partition this paper became popular among the Muslims and its circulation rose to ten thousand copies per week. But the Muslim middle class was still very weak and could not voice its opinion in a forceful manner. The settled fact of partition was unsettled within a few years.

By this time many radical papers were suppressed and many papers became defunct, but the Indian Press as a whole got a secure footing and newspaper industry, as we know it to-day, began to develop. A number of Anglo-Indian papers were amalgamated and as a result the *Times of India* and the *Statesman* came into existence. In the matter of amalgamation and strengthening the Anglo-Indian papers, Robert Knight played an important part. He is remembered for his liberal leanings and courageous stand that he took from time to time against Government's reactionary policies.

The repressive policy of the Government continued unabated and in 1910 a new repressive Press Act was promulgated. Bhupendranath Bose and Pandit Madanmohan Malaviya protested strongly, but in vain. In spite of repression, a large number of weeklies and dailies were started both in English and vernacular languages in different provinces of India. The First World War gave fresh impetus to the development of the Indian Press. The people were hungry for news and many weeklies published in Hindi and other

languages were converted into dailies. In Bengal, the *Basumati* (a weekly started in 1896 by Upendranath Banerji) was converted into a daily in 1914 under the editorship of Hemendraprasad Ghosh, the oldest Indian journalist still living and actively guiding the same paper.

With the development of the Press, News Agencies came into existence. Reuter had established a branch in India in 1878 and the Associated Press of India was founded in 1910.

The Indian Press had developed as a powerful organ of public opinion only through the struggles it conducted against the alien rule. The First World War opened a new chapter in our liberation struggle and India was on the threshold of a gigantic mass upsurge. The Press (excepting the Anglo-Indian Press) remained with the people and responded magnificently to the clarion call of freedom which went round the country.

## PERIODICALS

*Sajani Kanta Das*

Bipinchandra Pal in a life-sketch of his friend William T. Stead, the world-renowned editor of the *Review of Reviews*, said half a century ago:

“Stead’s fame in the modern world is due to his professional qualities as a journalist and an editor of periodicals. The influence of journalism on present day society cannot be overemphasized. Yet what seems surprising is the fact that the interests of the journalists are not properly looked after. The readers are almost indifferent to those who write for them. An English periodical usually serves as a mouth-piece for a political party. In doing so it propagates the aims and objectives of a party. Journalism of this description leaves no scope for proper self-expression of a writer, whose only incentive for writing in journals is money. (And therefore a journalist has to expound the opinions of those who pay for his writing.) No wonder such contributors are not allowed to use their own discretion in writing. Sometimes they have to write about things they do not themselves believe in. This mercenary journalism governed by the stomach and pocket view of a writer’s life can never encourage mental upliftment or self-expression. Since a long time the leaders of political groups and the capitalists in England had dominated and crushed the true humanitarian outlook of the journalists and editors of their country. And had it not been for Stead, who was the first



person to take a firm stand against this ruthless exploitation, a spirit of self-respect among English journalists would never have been imbibed”.

It was in the year 1890 that William Thomas Stead founded the *Review of Reviews*. And Butter's *Weekly Newes* founded in 1622 was the first newspaper to be published in England. Thus it becomes quite clear that a journalistic tradition of nearly three hundred years before Stead had failed to create a healthy freedom of press in England. But the beginning of Bengali journalism, in spite of a much later start, faced a more favourable atmosphere. A brief review of this has been attempted in the present sketch.

As a result of the able administration and farsightedness of the Governor-General Warren Hastings, Bengal began to be largely influenced by Western civilization and culture by the end of the eighteenth century.

A long chain of historical events such as the codification of law, introduction of printing, cutting of Bengali types to print books in the language, writing of a Bengali grammar in English, translation of *Srimadbhagabat Gita* and the works of Kalidasa, foundation of the Asiatic Society, and compilation of an English to Bengali dictionary occurred between the years 1776 and 1793. Just as Warren Hastings was blessed in his friends, the number of his enemies was not negligible at all. James Augustus Hicky was one among the last mentioned. Hicky chose to be a journalist in this country mainly because of his intention to start a campaign against Mr. and Mrs. Hastings and their circle of friends. He founded the *Bengal Gazette* on 29 January 1780. This was the first printed newspaper of India to be circulated on Western lines. Sir Elijah Impey, a friend of Hastings, became the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court during the latter's tenure of office. Impey who had already become infamous by pronouncing a death sentence on Maharaja Nanda Kumar, on the flimsy pretext of dispensing strict

justice, also banned the *Bengal Gazette* within the second year of its circulation. The official *Calcutta Gazette* began to appear almost immediately after this.

Very little is known of James Augustus Hicky, the pioneer of journalism in India, who imbibed the idea of settling up as a printer when he came across a treatise on printing in jail. William Hicky in his well-known *Memoirs* referred to the work of his namesake in words memorable in the history of Indian journalism. We learn from him that Hicky "sent to England for a regular and proper set of materials for printing". Outside Calcutta however, a press had been set up earlier in Hooghly where was printed a famous Bengali Grammar in English. The application of Hicky's talent to the campaign against Warren Hastings was responsible for the early banning of his journal. After the *Bengal Gazette* became defunct, other English periodicals such as the *India Gazette*, *Calcutta Gazette*, *Harkara* and *Calcutta Chronicle*, to name only a few, were founded and circulated regularly.

The story of the publication of the first Bengali newspaper is next in importance only to that of the first newspaper of India. The history of the early days of Bengali journalism begins with a controversy. The name of one Gangadhar Bhattacharya is prominently associated with published history and current hearsay about the beginning of Bengali journalism. He is supposed to have published the *Bengali Gazette* in 1816. No evidence exists however of anyone having ever seen any issue of this journal.

A study of Brajendranath Bandopadhyay's *Sambadpatre Sekaler Katha*, compiled from the old files of *Samachar Darpan* preserved with other collections in the library of Raja Radhakanta Deb Bahadur in Sobhabazar, corroborates the fact that the *Samachar Darpan* was published a couple of weeks earlier than the *Bengali Gazette*. The authenticity of this chronology may be questioned. But it gives a good evidence of the fact that the *Bengali Gazette*, a periodical

exclusively under Bengali control and management, was published from Calcutta near about 23 May 1818, as this was the date on which the first number of *Samachar Darpan* came out. The name of Gangakishore (and not Gangadhar) Bhattacharjee appears as the publisher, editor and manager of *Bengali Gazette*. The two other facts that Brajendranath established from a minute study of English periodicals are as follows. In the first place, the *India Gazette* of 14 May 1818 advertised that one Harachandra Roy had installed a printing press at 45 Chorebagan Street with a view to publish a weekly paper called *Bengali Gazette* (the English name is used). Secondly, the January 1819 number of the *Asiatic Journal* in an excerpt from the *Oriental Star* of 16 May 1818, entitled 'Bengali Newspapers', announced: "We observe with satisfaction that the publication of a Bengali Newspaper has been commenced". Brajendranath in the latest edition of his *Bangla Samayik Patra* published in Magh 1354 (B.E.) said (pages 11-16) that the publication of *Samachar Darpan* commenced two weeks earlier than that of *Bengali Gazette*. An acceptance of this fact establishes that the monthly magazine *Digdarsan* published by the Baptist missionaries at Serampore in April 1818 was the first Bengali periodical. John Clark Marshman became its first editor during the lifetime of his father Joshua Marshman, and his colleagues William Carey and William Ward, the founders of the mission in India. John's name also appears as the editor of the *Samachar Darpan* published on 23 May 1818. It is interesting to note that in this Bengal, a land of poets, journalism had its beginning with subjects like history, geography and science. The missionaries at that time exercised through the *Digdarsan* and the *Samachar Darpan* a dominant influence over Bengali journalism. Therefore what Bipinchandra calls independent journalism was yet unknown.

It is for future historians to ascertain the journalistic policy of *Bengali Gazette*, yet the fact that all work executed in connection with its publication was done by Bengalis is worth

remembering. And that is why the name of its founder-editor Gangakishore Bhattacharjee is as important as that of Hicky. His was indeed an amazing life. He hailed from the village of Bahara in Serampore and his education was not as good as it might have been. So he started his life as a compositor in the Baptist Mission Press. But he gave up his job later on to do his own business of book-publication. In 1816 he published Bharatchandra's *Annadamangal*, which was the first illustrated text to come out in Bengali language. Ferris & Co. did the printing for him. Afterwards he had his own printing press and published some of his own writings. His organising power and spirit of enterprise are as rare among the Bengalis of the present generation as they were during his own.

It was a practice among the missionaries to denounce Hinduism in many of their publications. Raja Rammohan Roy, the greatest Indian of the day, made up his mind to start his own journal for voicing a strong protest against this and to give a truer view of things. As a result of this, *Brahman Sebadhi* began to be circulated from September 1821. From the 4 December that followed he started publishing a weekly called *Sambad Kaumudi* and Bhabanicharan Banerjee assisted him considerably in publishing this paper. Due to a difference of opinion with Rammohan on the *Sati* question, Bhabanicharan left the *Sambad Kaumudi* and started publishing his own weekly journal, the *Samachar Chandrika*, from 5 March 1822.

From the study so far made it becomes obvious that each of our earliest newspapers and periodicals represented either a section or a group of the Bengali society and that they were born out of the controversies of the day. But not even one of these journals was directly edited by any established poet or literateur. Religion seemed to be the chief concern of journalism in those days. The advent of Iswar-chandra Gupta in *Sambad Prabhakar* (28 January 1830) raised for the first time our journalism to a literary level.

In the chronological table of our periodicals, *Sambad Prabhakar* occupied the fourteenth place. It was regularly circulated for 11 years and 8 months. After it became defunct, well over a thousand periodicals and journals came to be published in Bengali in the course of the century. The complex, involved and ambiguous style of Bengali shaped by the *munshis* and *pundits* of the Fort William College, or by foreign preachers and linguists, was transformed into a style that was far more simple, clear, intelligible and flexible chiefly through the agency of such periodicals. This development of the language not only helped one's day to day conversation but it also succeeded in satisfying the spiritual aspiration of our soul. Bipinchandra has narrated in detail the significant roles played by the *Tattvabodhini Patrika* and *Bangadarsan*. For a proper assessment of the importance of journalism in ushering in an all-round development of Bengal during the period of 82 years between 1818 and 1900, however, the names of quite a few other periodicals deserve mention.

Leaving out the other features and considering only the literary aspect of journalism, we have before us a picture of the following description.

The *Sambad Prabhakar* made its mark by the contributions of Iswarchandra Gupta and two other masters of the Bengali language—Rangalal Banerjee, the poet, and Akshoykumar Datta, the well-known writer on popular science. Other promising young contributors were Bankimchandra, Dinabandhu and Dwarkanath Adhikari. Iswarchandra arranged for a study of the history of Bengali literature by publishing little-known facts about the early poets of Bengal. He may be also called the life-force of the new age that was dawning in the literature of Bengal. His name will always be remembered as the poet of the period of transition, for he was the most famous representative of the old school of poetry and a pioneer of the modernistic style. Irrespective of caste and creed, he believed in a journalism that was unbiased in its

policy and that profoundly inspired the earliest literati of modern Bengal. A remarkable feature about the circle of writers of this period was that they were seriously engaged in remoulding the existing literary pattern of the country instead of imitating Western techniques. And poetry, not prose, was being reborn in the process.

The next important landmark in the history of journalism was the founding of the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* and the publication of the *Tattvabodhini Patrika* (16 August 1843). Mahārshi Debendranath Tagore was the leader of this circle and Akshoykumar Datta, who no longer belonged to Iswar Gupta's group, became the first editor of this journal and served in this capacity for twelve years. His attempts to popularise scientific topics in the medium of Bengali prose is well worth mentioning. Iswarchandra Vidyasagar also helped the *Tattvabodhini* group by his inimitable style of writing. Among others associated with this new group, the names of Ramchandra Vidyabagis, Rajnarain Bose and Rajendralal Mitra should also be mentioned. The ideal of journalism still remained traditional but with a tendency now towards the introduction of a better prose form in Bengali.

October 1851 is a memorable year in view of the publication of Rajendralal Mitra's monthly, the *Bibidhartha Sangraha*. His scientific method of presentation of a topic maintaining a strictly grammatical form of language introduced literary criticism in Bengali for the first time. He did not give up the old Indian ideals but, maintaining the literary heritage of his country, he was prepared to go ahead with the history, geography, natural science, zoology and other sciences from Europe, for widening the horizon of his national literature.

But was it indeed what may be called a national literature? Publications like *Panchatantra*, *Hitopades*, *Batris Sinhasan*, *Betal Panchabingsati*, *Kathasarit Sagar*, *Tales of Arabian Nights and of Persia*, *Gulebakabali*, *Hatemetai*, *Chahar Darbes* could hardly be considered as such. The year 1854 was

memorable because two alumni of the Hindu College belonging to the Young Bengal group, Pearychand Mitra and Radhanath Sikdar, emphatically decried the linguistic styles of Vidyasagar and Tarasankar. They advocated a more clear and simpler style to fit in with the intimate details of Bengali life. Pearychand took the pen name of Tekchand Thakur to publish his *Alaler Gharer Dulal*. He claimed to have characterised a true Bengali spirit in his 'Thag Chacha.'

The Bengali reading circle was amazed by this piece of writing, yet it failed in its appeal to one's soul. The true elements of literature did not exist in it. Bhudeb Mukherjee and Krishnakamal Bhattacharya attained considerable success in their literary efforts on journalistic lines. They told their tales in close imitation of English Romantic History, which nevertheless seemed to have a limited appeal.

This was followed by the publication of Bankimchandra's novels like *Durgeshnandini* (1865), *Kapalkundala* (1866), and *Mrinalini* (1869). While the readers of these were full of admiration for the author, the publication of these not being in periodicals only a limited number of people appreciated their real worth.

In Baisakh 1279 (1872) *Bangadarsan* was published. Bipinchandra's *Sahitye Nabayug: Bangadarsan-O-Bankim*, contained in his work *Nabayuger Bangla*, is a learned review (pp.151-154) of how the spirit of Bengal came of age in Bankimchandra's writings. A true representation of Bengali character was made in *Bisha-briksha*, *Indira*, *Chandra-sekhar* and *Krishnakanter Will* which were all published in *Bangadarsan*. The Bengalis could recognise their own selves in the self-analysis of Kamalakanta. Bankimchandra effectively absorbed the golden grains of foreign literature for translating them to his native soil to yield a rich harvest.

*Bharati* (July 1877) of the House of Tagore of Jorasanko as well as their *Sadhana* (1891) filled to overflowing the wealth of our Temple of Culture. Lit up by Rabindranath's

poetic mind, this was Bengal's noon-tide splendour. What was ably commenced by Bankimchandra attained mellow fruitfulness in Tagore. Taraknath Ganguli's *Swarnalata* published in *Jnanankur* (October 1872), Sanjibchandra Chatterjee's *Kanthamala* published in the *Bhramar* (April 1874), and Rameshchandra Datta's *Maharashtra Jiban Prabhat* in the *Bandhav* (June 1874), all added to the glory of the history of periodicals in Bengal. Rabindranath made this branch of literature more complete by writing short stories in the first seven issues of *Hitabadi* (May 1891).

The contribution of our periodical journalism in literary, educational and social fields as well as the part it played in promoting a spirit of nationalism and self-respect among Bengalis is no longer a matter of pedantic research. The spirit released in Dwarkanath Vidyabhushan's weekly *Somprakash* (15 Nov. 1858) was maintained by Keshabchandra's *Sulabh Samachar* (Nov. 1870) and it attained a height in Akshoychandra Sarkar's *Sadharani* (October 1873). In this connection Bhudeb Mukherjee's *Education Gazette* needs special mention (first published on 4 July 1856, it passed to Bhudeb in December 1868).

It is indeed quite right to conclude that our periodical literature has contributed immensely to the artistic and cultural growth of Bengal and the shaping of patriotic consciousness. Much of the glory of many eminent sons of Bengal has centred round the periodicals. Bipinchandra's glorious life is indeed full of such attainments. In paying our tribute to him we cannot overlook his contributions in the *Nabya Bharat*, the *Bangadarsan* (New Series), the *Narayan* and the *Bangabani*.

## NOTE

Translated from the original Bengali by Dipankar Sen, School of Printing Technology.



## 31

### CHRISTIANITY IN BENGAL

*Pierre Fallon*

A survey of the Bengali 'Renaissance' is incomplete and, to a great extent, unintelligible if it fails to consider the influence of Christianity upon nineteenth-century Bengal. Yet it is extremely difficult objectively to estimate the nature and importance of this influence; it may have been exaggerated in the past, there is a tendency to minimize it to-day. The influence of Christianity has been considerable but often indirect or hidden. In the analysis one makes of this Christian contribution to the awakening and shaping of modern Bengal, a distinction must be made between the part played by professed Christians, either foreign or Indian, whose primary life-purpose was religious evangelism, and the role of countless men whose aim was not to preach and spread Christianity but who, as Christian officials, educationists, social workers and the like, have brought the people of Bengal into contact with Christian values and ideals. Besides this personal contribution of individual Christians, Christianity often came under the guise of Western movements and ideologies, some of which no longer knew themselves as Christian; Western literatures and philosophies proved to be important, through at times, devious, channels of Christian influence. Many Bengali reformers, writers and thinkers, even such as were resolutely opposed to the spread of Christianity as a religion,

accepted many a Christian ideal and, in their various attempts at synthesis or syncretism, assimilated numerous Christian elements. Hundreds of thousands of Bengali boys and girls were educated in Christian schools and colleges, large numbers went abroad for higher studies: without becoming Christians, they were, at times deeply, influenced by Christianity. It may safely be said that Christianity has become one of the constituent parts of our modern cultural fabric, the Christian thread being today inseparable from the other threads which make the warp and woof of Bengali renascent civilization. 'Christianity in Bengal' undoubtedly means first and foremost the living faith, hope and charity of the Bengali followers of Christ and of their foreign associates, the churches and chapels where they assemble to pray, their schools and colleges and other institutions. But it means also the diffuse but real action of all those Christian ideas and ideals which, in various degrees and manners, have been integrated within the life and culture of modern Bengal.

### *The Coming of Christianity to Bengal*

Portuguese merchants started coming to Bengal as far back as 1517; Chittagong was the first Bengali harbour at which they called. J. J. A. Campos, in his *History of the Portuguese in Bengal* (Calcutta, 1919), has told in detail the story of these first expeditions and described the difficulties encountered by the new-comers. Christians though they certainly were, oftener than not they were but poor ambassadors of the Christian Message. By virtue of *firman*s granted them by Mahmud Shah (1537), Akbar (1579), and Shah Jahan (1633), the Portuguese successively settled in Satgaon and Chittagong, Hooghly, Bandel. When granting the *firman* to Tavares in the year 1579, the Mughal Emperor expressly conceded to the Portuguese full religious liberty with leave to preach their religion and build churches.

About the same date, we read of a priest, Fr. Juliano Pereira, in charge of the Satgaon church, and of two Jesuit missionaries, FF. P. Dias and A. Vaz, sent from Goa to

Bengal in 1576. Akbar, at Fatehpur Sikri, heard of a sermon preached by these priests, in which they told the Portuguese merchants that they were in conscience bound to pay the lawful taxes due to the Emperor. Akbar summoned Fr. Pereira to his court; later, he obtained that some Jesuit priests be sent to Agra. These facts are interesting because they clearly establish that the first preaching of Christianity in Bengal was free from political or military pressure on the part of the Portuguese. In fact, both Akbar in his dominions and the King of Arakan in Chittagong and the Eastern parts of Bengal greatly favoured the Christians and their priests. Later relations were not always as friendly.

Hooghly gradually became the most important Portuguese centre; the oldest Christian church still surviving today is the Bandel Church, built in 1599. It has become a pilgrimage centre where thousands, Christians and non-Christians, go to pray all through the year.

There were many other smaller establishments throughout Bengal. Some Jesuit missionaries went to East Bengal in 1598. Invited and cordially welcomed by Raja Pratapaditya and by the 'King' of Sripur, Kedar Ray, they even built a church which was solemnly inaugurated on 1 January 1600.

There were endless quarrels between the Portuguese and the local rulers of Bengal: many Portuguese were adventurers and pirates or just mercenaries who placed their services at the disposal of various warring princes. The missionaries and the Bengali Christians had often to suffer directly from their association with the Portuguese. In 1632, when Hooghly was besieged and sacked, all the churches were destroyed and many priests killed. Some were taken prisoners to Agra: among them was an elderly Bengali priest, Father M. Garcia, who died in jail. Shah Jahan soon restored and increased the privileges enjoyed by the Christians of Bengal: the Bandel Convent, headquarters of the Augustinian Fathers, and the Jesuit residence were, for many years,

the Bengal bases of the Christian missionary undertaking. Dacca, Chittagong, Jessore, and other centres continued to be little foci of Christian activity.

In 1663 a young princeling of Busna in East Bengal was taken prisoner by Magh pirates and redeemed by an Augustinian friar, Father D' Rozario. Due to a supernatural vision, he asked to become a Christian and went back to his estate where he began to preach, as a layman, to his family and friends; he soon attracted thousands, asked for priests to come and instruct his numerous converts. He had changed his name into Antonio D' Rozario; so did his converts adopt Portuguese names and surnames. After many difficulties, this new Christianity, the result of a Bengali youngman's initiative and zeal, organised itself around the church of Nagori (near Dacca). The bulk of the Bengali Catholics in East Bengal are descendants of those converts of Dom Antonio or of those who joined this community in later years. Their names are foreign but their blood, language and social traditions are purely indigenous; they are today more than 50,000, many of them now settled in or around Calcutta.

The power of the Portuguese declined, the importance of their commerce with Bengal diminished considerably; the Christianity they had brought remained. There are 'Portuguese' churches in many parts of the country; many customs introduced by them still subsist among the Bengali Catholics. Calcutta has attracted most 'Luso-Indians', the descendants of Portuguese settlers and of Bengali women they married (the Portuguese never had any 'colour-bar' and encouraged inter-racial marriages); in fact, the majority of our 'Anglo-Indians' are more Portuguese (Lusitanians) than English, even though most Luso-Indians have adapted their surnames to the prevailing English usage. Beside the thousands of Luso-Indians and the numerous Goans, the Portuguese left in Bengal thousands of Bengali Catholics, especially in East Bengal.

This first coming of Christianity to Bengal did not, directly at least, influence the development of Bengali culture as a whole. In the late 18th century and during the first decades of the 19th century, the Luso-Indian community will play a more important part in the social and cultural life of Calcutta. The Barrettos, Pereiras, Picachys, Lackers-teens, de Souza's, and other Luso-Indian Calcutta families have contributed much to the religious, educational and commercial activities of old Calcutta. Henry L. V. Derozio's personal contribution to the Bengali Renaissance is well known; he was a Luso-Indian.

### *Serampore and Fort William*

If Christianity has deeply influenced the history of nineteenth-century Bengal, it is first and foremost because of the work of William Carey. Carey was not alone; Ward and Marshman, his Baptist colleagues, his own sons, the little team of Bengali co-workers whom he grouped around him at Serampore and in Fort William, others still, helped him and enabled him to do all that he did. Yet, fundamentally, it all rested upon the zeal and extraordinary personality of the little Leicester cobbler.

"Many plants to be found in Bengal to-day came of seeds first bird-borne or wind-sown from Carey's garden". This statement of a Calcutta University professor directly refers only to horticulture or agriculture. But it is true in a much wider sense. According to a well-known historian of Bengal: "The record of the work done by the Serampore missionaries reads like an Eastern romance. They created a prose vernacular literature for Bengal; they established the modern method of popular education; they founded the present Protestant North India Church. They gave the first impulse to the native press. They set up the first steam-engine in India: with its help they introduced the modern manufacture of paper on a large scale. They translated and printed the Bible or parts thereof, into 31 (nay, more)

languages. They built a College, which ranked among the most splendid educational edifices in India....".

Carey had come to India, much against the wishes of the official world and in defiance of the Company's orders, in 1793. He died at Serampore, an old man of 72, in 1834. The Bengali Renaissance was only starting when he died but he had prepared it. Not himself a humanist or a University man, as Duff will be after Carey had gone, not even a very talented writer, he was a genius and his accomplishments were extraordinary. Dr. S. K. De rightly wrote: "Carey was the centre of the learned Bengalis, whom his zeal attracted around him. The impetus which he gave to Bengali learning is to be measured not merely by his productions and his educational labours, but by the influence he exerted and the example he set".

Beside his Serampore work (Christian evangelism, Bible translation, printing of Bengali 'classics', newspapers, village schools, etc.), his Fort William work (Carey was a professor there from 1801 to 1830) had far-reaching consequences. He helped to train some of the ablest administrators of Bengal and he trained them according to his Christian ideals and principles. He directed, encouraged, made possible the work of a Mrityunjay, Rajiblochan, Ramram Basu, Golaknath, and other Bengali pundits.

He fought a life-long battle against social evils like *suttee*, infanticide, caste, etc. Lord Wellesley and, later, Lord Bentinck depended much on his advice for the reforms they initiated. Yet Carey did not want or permit any Government's patronage or interference to compromise his work. "Let not Government touch my work; it can only succeed in making them hypocrites: I wish to make them Christians". He did baptize a few earnest and sincere disciples, and he organized the first Baptist communities. He encountered severe opposition both on the part of some Bengali Hindus and, more bitterly, on the part of British businessmen and 'colonials'.

Before he died, he blessed and advised Duff, who was to be the principal Christian promoter of the Bengal Renaissance.

### *Derozio and Duff*

Can these two names be bracketed together? The Eurasian poet, teacher and journalist, the 'free-thinker' of the Hindu College, the leader of 'Young Bengal', who died, barely 22 years old, in 1831 and the Scotch missionary who, during the 33 years of his Indian work (1830-1863), powerfully influenced the development of higher education and the spread of scientific knowledge, the official policy of social reform, the conversion to Christianity of dozens of brilliant and dynamic youngmen from among the best-known families of Calcutta? Rammohan Roy has been compared to Erasmus, the Prince of the Renascent; Derozio might be compared to Pico de la Mirandole, Duff rather to Ignatius Loyola. But the influence of Derozio prepared the way for the work of Duff, and several of Duff's converts and disciples had been Derozio's enthusiastic admirers. Young Derozio's humanistic thirst for knowledge and his infectious ardour for reform might have led to culture anarchy or vain eclecticism if Duff had not systematically organised and directed the energies thus released.

Alexander Duff's contribution to our Renaissance has been manifold. The College he founded and directed for many years is a great achievement but Duff's influence extended far beyond the limits of his College. The whole educational policy of the Government was greatly indebted to him, and the famous quarrel which opposed Anglicists and Orientalists was solved, to a large extent, according to his advice and ideal. The 1835 legislation which brought about a definite reorientation in science and letters and prepared the 1854 'Education Despatch', soon followed by the foundation (1857) of the Calcutta University, owed much to Duff.

Duff arrived in Calcutta in 1830. Social reform and cultural awakening, religious and philosophical inquiry were

proceeding vigorously: Rammohan Roy was at the height of his influence, science was attracting Bengali youth, everything traditional was being questioned. Duff decided to start a college; he himself lectured on chemistry, psychology, ethics. Beside college work, he placed himself at the disposal of young inquirers who daily came to visit him; he gave lectures on religious problems.

The Christian influence of Duff spread far and wide. It also resulted in a number of remarkable conversions. K. M. Banerjea, whose influence was soon to be so great in Bengal's intellectual circles, was one of Duff's first converts; he had been a friend of Derozio, a student of Hindu College. Rev. Lalbehari Dey and dozens of others became Duff's disciples; many played a prominent part in our mid-century Renaissance.

An ancient chronicler of Calcutta has described the attraction Duff's work exercised on his contemporaries. "All Calcutta, official, mercantile and military, Europeans and Indians, used to attend Duff's periodical examinations of the students of his College, and marvel at the stream of 'useful information', scientific, historical, literary, and theological that he pumped out of his Bengali pupils. It was the age of Children's Guides to Knowledge...and Duff was Bengal's guide."

It would be wrong however to believe that Duff was a kind of solitary and dictatorial guide. The years between 1830 and 1863 were years of great intellectual agitation and fermentation. Beside Duff's College, other institutions of higher learning were contributing to the general awakening. Among them, some other schools and colleges were started by Christian societies or individuals: St. Xavier's, begun in 1835, knew around the years 1842-1843 a great prosperity; La Martiniere had been finally organized in 1836; Deveton College started about the same time. In 1841, the Irish Nuns of Loreto House arrived in Calcutta; before them, young ladies of Eurasian extraction had already, as early as 1819,



begun to work for the education of the women of Bengal under the guidance of the Baptist Serampore missionaries. In 1835, the Medical College was being organized and Dr. Henry Goodeve was training locally, and sending overseas for further medical training, some of the most brilliant Calcutta youths, some the students of Duff.

The conversion of leading intellectuals to Christianity brought to Duff fierce opposition and many worries. The officials did not generally approve any type of proselytism which might hurt the feelings of the population; they often found fault with missionaries even when their activities were in fact beyond reproach. For a long time, even after the 1833 Charter, converts to Christianity were, so far as Government office was concerned, practically disqualified. The policy of financial aid to Mission schools was not officially approved till 1854.

A complete and detailed study of the Christian contribution to the Renaissance of Bengal would require a closer examination of the work and life of those Bengali converts who were baptized between 1830 and 1860. Many of them were men who played important parts in the social and cultural life of their time. Michael Madhusudan is the only one (apart from the Datta sisters) who attained to literary fame; his contribution to Bengali literature is extremely important and typically 'renascent'. His Christianity may not have been faultless, though his faith in Christ was profound and sincere; his work is the direct result of that mid-century fermentation and awakening fostered by Derozio, Duff, K.M. Banerjea and their friends. Rev. Krishnamohan, the editor of the *Enquirer* in Derozio's days, a teacher in Hare's school, baptized in 1832, later ordained minister of the Church of England, honorary doctor-in-law of the Calcutta University, member of the Asiatic Society and member of the Calcutta Municipality, the author of numerous tracts, articles and sermons, worked incessantly for the educational, intellectual and spiritual progress of his countrymen; his family, a large and noble Christian family, has

continued Krishnamohan's action to this day. Duff baptized some 50 youngmen. In the same period, other Bengali families or individuals joined the Christian fold. Outside Calcutta, in the other districts, Christianity was also spreading in various directions. East Bengali Catholics were settling in Calcutta.

### *Western 'values' and Christianity*

It has been said that Shakespeare had contributed more effectively to the 'Christianizing' of Bengali culture than the Bible itself. Add to Shakespeare Milton, and Pope and a host of other poets and English writers, bring in so many Western thinkers whose thought influenced the Bengali students of the 19th century Renaissance period. Christianity has moulded and fostered Western culture to the point of being at times identified with it. Many of the social and political traditions of the West owe much to the once-prevalent Christian *Weltanschauung*. In the years 1830-1860, before the rise of Hindu revivalism and Indian nationalism, Bengali intellectuals eagerly assimilated, at times without much discrimination or logical consequence, Western values and ideas, either distinctly Christian or Christian in origin and in part. Later, a reaction will set in and, while science and various secular ideologies will continue to exert a large influence, religious and philosophical ideas will be less easily accepted. It would be difficult to point out what particular Christian values and ideas were more especially adopted, what new values and ideas are specifically Christian, to what extent the impact of Christian thought and culture brought about the addition of something absolutely new or the rediscovery, in the light of Christian principles and doctrines, of elements traditional to Indian society. Democracy and the absolute dignity of the human person (not of the human *atman* only), the ideal of monogamous marriage, the intimate and inseparable relation between religious faith and social service, the close connection between ethics and devotion, and many more such Christian values are not the exclusive

monopoly of Christianity and India did not wait till the 19th century to cherish these ideals; yet, the contact with the Christian civilization positively helped 19th century Bengal to recast and re-orientate its life according to these principles. In other respects, in art and literature, the Renaissance did bring about the adoption and cultivation by Bengali humanists of *genres* and themes, the development of which had been much influenced by Christianity in the West. The novels of Bankim and later those of a Sarat or even of Rabindranath are not a product of Christianity, not even the direct result of a Christian influence; yet, they might have been impossible without the Renaissance contact with Christian literature.

Many nominal Christians came from the West and worked in Bengal; others whose lives were inspired by their Christian faith came also. Some of those who did most for India were genuinely Christian. A. Mayhew, in an original and well-documented study, *Christianity and the Government of India* (London, 1929), has searchingly analysed "the Christian forces at work in the administration of India". Another author, one who had been intimately connected with Gokhale, H. C. E. Zacharias, in his revealing book *Renascent India* (London, 1933), follows, from Rammohan Roy to Gandhi, the movement of India's Renaissance in the social and in the political sectors; he also indicates the influence of Christian ideals on much of this movement.

### *Non-Christian Christianity*

*The Precepts of Jesus* by the Father of Bengal's Renaissance, R. M. Roy, are not traditional Christianity. Keshab's devotion to Christ and the Holy Spirit or Pratap Mazumdar's *Oriental Christ* are not either in the Christian tradition. Yet, the whole Brahmo ideology is suffused with Christianity. And, without narrow-mindedly trying to annex Tagore or exaggerate any particular influence upon his genius, *Gitanjali* and *Gora* and *The Home and the World* and so much else in Rabindranath's work reveal the presence of Christianity as one of

the important factors or elements in the elaboration of his artistic creation. Swami Vivekananda's case may be diametrically different. Christianity did influence him powerfully but rather as a challenge which decided him to rally all the forces of Hinduism against the spread of an 'alien' faith and to compete with it on its own ground. And thus many other reformers and leaders of renascent Bengal underwent the influence of Christianity; their syntheses would be unintelligible without it.

### *Christianity in Bengal Today*

Christianity is not Western or Eastern; in fact, it has been Indian from its very beginnings. Yet it came to Bengal in a foreign garb, Portuguese or English; there seemed to be something essentially Luso-Indian or Anglo-Indian about Christianity in Bengal. Things are changing today. Independence has clearly shown that Indian Christians were as truly Indian as the other citizens of this land. Christians (there are some 200,000 Christians in Bengal) try more and more to be, or to become again, truly Indian and Bengali in culture. The majority of Bengali Christians express their devotion and faith in ways traditionally indigenous. The European and Anglo-Indian Christians remain a little more aloof from Bengali cultural life, though even there a sensible progress is noticeable. The Christian educational institutions and social-service or charitable organisations continue to spread the influence of Christian charity and doctrine. Individual conversions take place from time to time but do not arouse the passionate opposition of former times. More frequent and closer contacts with the West have made the living Christianity of some parts of the Western world and society more truly 'present' to us than it was in the past.

## THE MUSSALMANS OF BENGAL

*Kazi Abdul Wadud**Their origin*

Scholarly writings of Risley, Beverly and Hunter gave, in the last quarter of the 19th century, wide currency to the theory that the Mussalmans of Bengal sprang from the lower strata of the Hindus of the province, and that the sword of Islam was primarily responsible for the conversion. The theory was challenged in the eighties of the century by Khundkar Muhammad Fazle Rabbi, the then Dewan of the Murshidabad Nawab's Estate, in his Persian work *Haqiqat-i-Musalmanan-i-Bangala*, an English version of which was also brought out by him under the caption: *The Origin of the Musalmans of Bengal*. Of the arguments advanced by him against the theory, the most weighty is the following: how to account for the comparative paucity of Mussalmans in Northern India, the seat of Muslim power for centuries, where the notorious sword of Islam could not have been shy. The Dewan's researches went a long way to establishing that a fairly large number of Musalmans were not indigenous to Bengal. They came here as soldiers, government officials and traders; there were instances of migration of some substantial Muslim families from Delhi to Bengal on account of political differences. To the findings of the Dewan may be added two more: firstly, Bengal was a stronghold of Pathans who offered stubborn

and protracted resistance to the onrushing Mughals; these Pathans could never be wiped out in course of their defeat; they contributed largely, it is fair to assume, towards the growth of the Muslim population in Bengal through successive generations. Secondly, after the decisive Plassey the Pathan armies of the Nawabs of Murshidabad were gradually disbanded. These soldiers fared as raiders and free-booters for a time, and were subsequently merged in the Muslim population of the province.

Yet it is not to be denied—the Dewan is disposed that way—that conversion played a great part in determining Bengal's Muslim strength. And along with it we must remind ourselves of the historical phenomenon that conquerors as a rule take wives from amongst the conquered. These conversions were however due not so much to the conqueror's sword as to the great influence wielded by Muslim *faqirs* and *dervishes* reputed for their occult powers. There is such an account of a *dervish* or *shaikh* in the Sanskrit book *Shaikh Subhodaya* ('the Holy Advent of the Shaikh'). He, it is reported, came to Bengal in the reign of Lakhshmana Sena, the last of the Hindu Kings, and impressed the King greatly by occult powers. Conversions, effected in Syhlet by the famous Muslim saint Shah Jalal, are well known. Of the factors which proved helpful to the proselytizing *dervishes*, two deserve special mention: the Bengalis' love of novelty, and the religious conflict of the time known as the Buddhist-Hindu conflict. Historians tell us that Bengal was once practically a Buddhist land. That this great Buddhist population merged in the growing Hindu population without demur is too good to be true. We have, on the contrary, the more probable picture of the persecuted Buddhists looking wistfully to the conquering Muslims as their deliverers in the following well-known lines of the *Sunya Purana* of Ramai Pandit.

The followers of the Vedas became very powerful;  
they went out in bands and destroyed the Buddhists

.....Dhamma (the presiding Deity of the Buddhists) was greatly pained at all this and assumed in his mystery the forms of Mussalmans with black caps on their heads and bows and arrows in their hands. They rode powerful horses which struck terror on all sides, and they cried out one name, 'Khuda'. Brahma became Muhammad, Vishnu became the Prophet and Siva became Adam; Ganesh became Gazi and Kartik became the Qazi and all the ancient Rishis became Faqirs and Dervishes—the goddess Chandi became Hava (Eve), and Padmavati became the Lady of Light (Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet). All the gods and goddesses entered Jajpur (a big village) in a body. They went on pulling down walls and gates, feasted merrily upon booty and cried out—catch them, catch them.

The conversion of the Buddhists and of the new Hindus to Islam was facilitated very likely by these inviting features of the new religion: it was free from the trammels of untouchability and caste and encouraged the worship of the Formless Niranjana more or less as Buddhism did, and it was wedded to the belief in miracles and in the infallibility of the spiritual guide like the old religion. The love of novelty of the Bengalis to which we have alluded did not fail to show in the British period as well. Christianity could not, it is true, make much headway in Bengal, but that was due to Bengal's vigorous reform movements—both Hindu and Muslim—throughout the 19th century; Europe's penetration into Bengal is all the same deep and wide.

### *The Old Order*

From the information, by no means ample, we have about the Bengali Muslim population of old we may hold that it was highly composite. The Buddhist and the Hindu elements, that is the indigenous elements, were by far the largest; but the Arabian, Iranian and Pathan elements too were not negligible. Arabs, considerable in number, came

through the trade channel of Chittagong: the *patois* of the district has been influenced by them. The Iranians were few in number and came mostly as government officials. And Pathans—high as well as low—came in legions we may say. Pathan zemindars are not a rarity in Bengal even now.

By Bengal's Muslim population of old we mean their successive generations from their advent in the land in the 12th century till the rise of the British power in Bengal in the 18th. Details regarding their social and cultural changes in the course of these centuries are yet to be known. We are however in possession of the broad fact that the proud exclusiveness of the early Mussalmans, i. e. of the section that came from outside and were the more influential, mellowed in course of time, so much so, that from amongst Muslims themselves arose scholarly poets versed in Sanskrit lore, *Bauls* (vagrant singers) with their affinities with the Buddhists, the Vedantists and the Sufis, and Vaishnava poets singing of Radha and Krishna symbolising individual soul and universal soul. Some of these poets and singers are honoured names in the literature of Bengal.

### *Changed Outlook in the 19th Century*

But this significant mediaeval rapproachment between the Hindus and the Muslims—well told by Pandit Kshiti-mohan Sen in a number of his writings—came in for almost total disavowal by a powerful section of Muslim intelligentsia at the start of the 19th century under the conviction that it meant degeneration of Islam and Muslim life in the not very congenial atmosphere of India. This way of thought, commonly known as Wahhabism from its association with Abdul Wahhab, the mid-18th century Arabian reformer and fighter, went on gaining volume and momentum throughout the 19th century and may still be considered the dominant thought among the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent. A student of Modern Islam, and



particularly of Indian Islam, has to understand with care this powerful religious literalism and revivalism.

Literature on Wahhabism is not scarce. Its roots seem to be deep-laid in Islam. "You must not say 'Why'? in respect of any utterance in the Quran. You are to abide by whatever is written in the book"—this non-reasoning formalist attitude is as time-honoured as the 'way of reason' of Abu Hanifa of the 8th century. Reason, however, had the precedence of unfoldment in the history of Islamic thought. It suffered eclipse so to say through Al-Gazali of the 11th century who took pains to point out the insufficiency of reason as a guiding principle of life, and it was through his exertions that Sufism came to dominate the Muslim mind. Sufism is a medley of many systems of thought, the common factor of them all being the beginner's unquestioning obedience to the *Pir* or the *Shaiikh*, i. e. the master who initiates his disciple into the mysteries of spiritual realisation. The Sufi prizes his scriptures of course, but holds the spiritual guide to be higher in authority: the way to Truth lies, according to the Sufi, through the spiritual guide, and the supreme objective of the Sufi's life is the forging of ties of love with Him who provides for all and is their last resort. Sufism influenced the Muslim world and its spheres of influence for some centuries. Its main teaching, i.e. unquestioning obedience to the spiritual guide, was severely criticized as being an innovation on original Islam by Ibn Taymiah in the early years of the 14th century. He succeeded in winning popularity, but could not wean people from Sufism. It went on dominating Muslims and their spheres of influence for a few centuries more. It came in for a fresh assault in the hands of Abdul Wahhab referred to above who however succeeded in making a real impression on the Muslim masses, perhaps largely on account of his political successes. Shah Syiid Ahmad of Rai-Bareili, U. P., took, while on pilgrimage to Mecca, the cue from

Abdul Wahhab's ideas and doings, and it was through him that Wahhabism assumed in the first quarter of the 19th century the proportions of a mass movement throughout India.

Wahhabism, which has for its high objective the shunning of all innovations and a close imitation of the habits and manners of the Prophet, may be considered a particular variety of religious development in Islam's fairly long career. But much of the real significance of the Wahhabite movement will be missed by him who does not see that its amazing vogue in the present era is not so much pietistic as political. It was in the mid-18th century that the Muslim world showed unmistakable signs of disintegration while the nations of Europe went on thriving. Introspective Mussalmans at this juncture had naturally to ask themselves: how is it that Islam which promised victory for its followers is now going down? And the reply that suggested itself to the Wahhabite leadership was that Islam had been allowed to fall away from its pristine purity—an offence unpardonable indeed for Mussalmans.

The political aspect of the Wahhabite movement of Arabia is not so apparent, but that of Indian Wahhabism is too obvious. The 18th century was for the Mussalmans of India a century of profound insensibility, portrayed so ably by Syed Ghulam Hossain in his *Sier Mutaqherin*. In that age the Indian Muslim lost his political power, his wealth, his honour, one by one, and became conscious of his terrible losses at long last, when he could do nothing else except wail and shed bitter tears. But even in this predicament he shook himself up putting forth his last ounce of energy. This is the story in brief of how Indian Wahhabism was born and made desperate efforts for a time. (Its subsequent developments also are significant). At first the Wahhabis encountered the Sikhs. Then they had to wage bitter war against the British. We are quoting their fiat of *jihad* against the Sikhs from W. W. Hunter's *Our Indian Mussalmans*:

The Sikh nation has long held sway in Lahore and other places. Their oppressions have exceeded all bounds. Thousands of Mohammedans have they unjustly killed, and on thousands they have heaped disgrace. No longer do they allow call of prayer from the mosques, and the killing of cows they have entirely prohibited. When at last their insulting tyranny could no more be endured, Hazrat Syaid Ahmad (may his fortunes and blessings ever abide) having for his single object the protection of the Faith took with him a few Mussalmans and going in the direction of Kabul and Peshawar, succeeded in rousing Mohammedans from the slumber of indifference and nerving their courage for action. Praise be to God, some thousands of believers became ready at his call to tread the path of God's service, and on the 21st of December 1826 the 'Jihad' against the infidel Sikhs begins.

We are quoting the same authority on the Wahhabis' attitude towards the British:

Those who deter others from Holy War or flight are in heart hypocrites. Let all know this. In a country where the ruling religion is other than Muhammedanism, the religious principles of Muhammad cannot be enforced. It is incumbent on Muhammedans to join together and wage war upon infidels. Those who cannot take part in the fight should emigrate to the country of the True Faith. At the present time in India flight is a stern duty. He who denies this let him declare himself a slave to sensuality. He who having gone away, returns again let him know that all his past services are in vain. Should he die in India he will lose his way to salvation. In short, Oh Brethren, we ought to weep over our state, for the messenger of God is angered with us because of our living in

the land of the infidel. When the Prophet of God himself is displeased with us, to whom shall we look for shelter? Those whom God has supplied with the means should resolve upon flight, for a fire is raging here. If we speak the truth we shall be strangled; and if we remain silent injury is done to our faith.

The obvious sore point with the Wahhabis was that India had been turned into a non-Muslim land—*Dar-ul-Harb*—where the holy laws of Islam were no longer operative. So the motive behind the upheaval may be considered by some to be religious. They are right in a way. But religion here means much more than it ordinarily does, it means the entire range of political and economic rights and privileges of Mussalmans, which Hunter has taken pains to elucidate in the third and fourth chapters of his work. This is the gist of what he says: according to the Muslim religious standpoint, a state becomes non-Muslim, *Dar-ul-Harb*, when Muslims cannot enjoy in it *aman-i-awwal*. Those who interpret *aman-i-awwal* as meaning freedom of religious practices are, according to Hunter, mistaken; *aman-i-awwal* means the whole security and full religious status which the Muhammadans formerly enjoyed under their own rule.

How these rights and securities enjoyed by Mussalmans became things of the past has been narrated by Hunter at some length and with a good amount of sympathy. But we should go back to the early days of the British rule to have a fairly complete picture of the Mussalmans' reactions to the new regime.

We have mentioned the amazing eighteenth century insensibilities of Indian Mussalmans. With that the cautious British move for territorial expansion fitted in so neatly that the momentous change remained unnoticed in both the camps for a pretty long time. Says Hunter:

The English obtained Bengal simply as the Chief Revenue Officer of the Delhi Emperor. Instead of buying the appointment by a fat bribe we won it by the sword. But our legal title was simply that of the Dewan or Chief Revenue Officer (See the Firman of the 12th Aug. 1765 in Mr. Aitchison's Treaties or in the Quarto collection put forth by the East India Company in 1812, XVI to XX). As such the Mohammedans hold that we were bound to carry out the Mohammedan system which we then undertook to administer. There can be little doubt, I think, that both parties to the treaty at the time understood this. For some years the English maintained these Mohammedan officers in their posts; and when they began to venture upon reform they did so with a caution bordering on timidity.

In 1780 the Calcutta Madrassa was established by Warren Hastings at the request of some leading Muslims; the institution was to act as the recruiting centre of qualified *Quazis* and *Muftis*. But the change became pronounced before long:

The greatest blow which we dealt to the old system was in one sense an underhand one, for neither the English nor the Mohammedans foresaw its effects. This was the series of changes introduced by Lord Cornwallis and Sir. John Shore ending in the Permanent Settlement of 1793. By it we usurped the functions of those higher Mussalman officers who had formerly subsisted between the actual Collector and the Government, and whose dragoons were the recognised machinery for enforcing Land-tax. Instead of Mussalman Revenue-Farmers with their troopers and spearmen, we placed an English Collector in each District with an unarmed fiscal police attached like common bailiffs to his Court. The Mohammedan nobility

either lost their former connections with the Land-Tax or became mere landholders with an inelastic title to a part of the profits of the soil. The Permanent Settlement, however, consummated rather than introduced this change. It was in another respect that it most seriously damaged the position of the great Mohammedan Houses. For the whole tendency of the settlement was to acknowledge as the landlords the subordinate Hindu officers who dealt directly with the husbandmen. I have carefully gone over the MS. Settlement Report of 1788-90 and notwithstanding the clauses touching intermediate holders in the Code of 1793, it is clear to me that our Revenue Officers of those days had an eye to only three links in the previous system—the State, the local agent or landholder who collected direct from the peasantry and the husbandmen who tilled the soil. These were the three features of the former administration requisite to our new plan, and by degrees all the other links of the Mohammedan Revenue System were either extruded or allowed to drop out. For example, the provision respecting the separation of independent Talukdars was in itself fatal to the greatness of many a Mohammedan House. Such a family, although it might grant away part of its territory in permanent farms, always exercised a sort of jurisdiction over its subordinate holders and when occasion demanded, managed to extract cesses or benevolences, in short money in one form or other, from them. The officer (Mr. James O’Kinealy, C. S.) who has studied the Permanent Settlement most intimately in connection with the present Mohammedan disaffection (Wahabi Rebellion of 1868) writes thus: “It elevated the Hindu Collectors, who upto that time had held but unimportant posts, to the position of landholders, gave them a proprietary right in the soil, and

allowed them to accumulate wealth which would have gone to the Mussalmans under their own Rule”.

But disastrous as was the effect of the Permanent Settlement on the economic position of Mussalmans (their classes were by it largely divested of their landed possessions and their masses shared in the general economic ruin of the *ryots*), the Resumption Proceedings spelt for them a mightier disaster still. Says Hunter:

The British on assumption of power in Bengal enquired into the condition of land tenures and discovered that one-fourth of the lands of the province were being used as rent-free grants. Warren Hastings came to know of this state of affairs as early as 1772. But the feeling against resuming such tenures was then too strong to allow of any active steps being taken. In 1793 Lord Cornwallis again asserted in the strongest and broadest manner the inalienable right of government to rent-free grants which had not obtained the sanction of the Ruling Power. But even the stronger government of the day did not venture to carry out these principles. The subject rested for another quarter of a century until 1819, when the government again asserted its rights, but again shrank from enforcing them. It was not until 1828 that the legislature and the executive combined to make one great effort. Special courts were created and during the next eighteen years the whole province was overrun with informers, false witnesses and calm, stern Resumption officers<sup>1</sup>. At an outlay of £800,000 upon resumption proceedings an additional revenue of £300,000 a year was permanently gained by the State representing 5% on a capital of 6 million sterling. A large part of this sum was derived from lands held rent-free by Mussalmans or Muhammedan foundations. The panic and hatred which ensued have stamped themselves for

ever on rural records. Hundreds of ancient families were ruined, and the educational system of the Muhammedans, which was almost entirely maintained by rent-free grants, received its death blow. . . . Muhammedan foundations suffered most, for with regard to their title deeds, as with regard to all other matters, the former conquerors of India had displayed a haughty indifference unknown to the provident and astute Hindu. (The resumption proceedings were fiercest at the beginning, and after languishing for seven years were officially terminated by government order of March 4, 1846).

Hunter is unreserved in his opinion that the great majority of these rent-free grants were anything but legal or equitable; but says he: "During seventyfive years we had submitted under protest to a gigantic system of fraud, and the accumulated penalty fell upon a single generation."

Rammohan lent his weight on the side of the petitioners to government against the Resumption Proceedings both in India and England, but his endeavours were not successful.

The age of Resumption Proceedings was also the age of the change of Court language from Persian into English. The two outstanding reasons for which the Mussalmans avoided the learning of English were: their apprehension of conversion to Christianity—not a baseless apprehension either as the contemporary records go to show—and their aversion for British rule or rather the British way of life. This second was the mightier one of course, amply expressed in the long-drawn out Wahhabi rebellion. That the British rulers looked upon the Wahhabi rebellion as the rebellion of the Indian Mussalmans in general is borne out by the full title of Hunter's book which is—*Our Indian Mussalmans: Are They Bound to owe Allegiance to the Queen?*—This rebellion commenced in Bengal in 1831 with Titu Mian, a disciple of Shah



Syyid Ahmad. In the *Imperial Gazetteer* (Vol XXIV—p.71) he is mentioned thus:

Titu belonged to the Wahhabi sect of the Muhammedan fanatics and was excited to rebellion in 1831 by a beard tax—imposed by Hindu landholders. He collected a force of insurgents 3000 strong, and cut to pieces a detachment of Calcutta militia which was sent against him. The Magistrate collected reinforcements but they were driven off the field. Eventually the insurgents were defeated by a force of regulars and their stockade was taken by assault.

The next important Wahhabi or Faraezi leader of Bengal was Haji Shariatullah of Faridpur who was senior to Titu in age but died in 1840. He however concentrated his activities particularly on religious reforms i. e. on weaning the Muslim masses from their long-standing customs and observances which could not be called Islamic. He assisted the fighting Wahhabis also, but not openly. That the armed rebellion of the Wahhabis extended even to the distant hamlets of Bengal is borne out by the following curious lines from Hunter:

The Wahhabi preachers have drifted away to almost certain slaughter hundreds of deluded youths, generally under twenty, and often without the consent of their parents, from nearly every district of Eastern Bengal. They have introduced misery and bereavement into thousands of peasant families and created a feeling of chronic anxiety throughout the whole rural population with regard to their most promising young men. No Wahhabi father who has a boy of more than usual parts or piety, can tell the moment at which his son may not suddenly disappear from the hamlet. Of the youths thus spirited away by far the greater portion perished by pestilence, famine and sword.

The lines are curious indeed as they reveal the striking parallelism between the youthful Wahhabi Bengalis of mid-19th century and the youthful Hindu Bengali terrorists of the early 20th century.

The Wahhabi rebellion which had started long before the Sepoy Mutiny assumed menacing proportions during that widespread uprising, and continued almost unabated till the Wahhabi Trial of 1868. Its suppression cost the British Government much both in men and money, but the Mussalmans of India suffered much more as it meant for them almost complete degeneration and confusion. They had now to ask themselves afresh questions regarding their Faith and their mundane duties and reconcile themselves to the view that India was not a non-Muslim land—*Dar-ul-Harb*—as the rulers did not interfere with the religious practices of the Mussalmans. This new leadership, associated in Bengal with the name of Nawab Abdul Latif Khan Bahadur, is memorable and equally memorable is Hunter's sarcasm on it: "The result (new decision) must be accepted as alike satisfactory to the well-to-do Mussalmans whom it saves from the perils of contributing to the Fanatical Camp on our Frontier, and gratifying to ourselves as proving that Law and Prophets can be utilised on the side of loyalty as well as on the side of sedition."

Nawab Abdul Latif, the new leader of the Mussalmans of Bengal in the second half of the 19th century, was in youth a friend of Michael Madhusudan Datta, though cast in a different mould. He became a deputy magistrate in 1849 and distinguished himself in the service. In 1863 he declared a prize of Rs.100/- for the best essay in Persian on "How far would the inculcation of European Sciences through the medium of the English language, benefit the Muhammedan students in the present circumstances of India, and what are the most practicable and unobjectionable means of imparting such instruction?"

In the same year he started a cultural organisation named Muhammadan Literary Society which functioned efficiently for some twenty years. In 1868 he read a paper in the Bengal Social Science Association on the condition of education among Mussalmans in which he made no secret of his co-religionists' antipathy to English education. He himself was favourably disposed towards the education imparted in the Calcutta Madrassa and concluded his paper with the following proposals: firstly, he suggested the establishment of a purely Arabic institution or rather the retention of the existing one upon an improved basis for the benefit of those members of the learned class who were undesirous of acquiring an English education, and of an Anglo-Persian School offering extraordinary advantages for the education of the rest of the Muslim community; and secondly, he wanted to add a few college-classes to the Anglo-Persian Department of the Madrassa. All the four classes which generally composed a Government college on the eastern side of India were not, in his opinion, to be represented at once; they might be laid on gradually as they became necessary. And with regard to the wherewithal he remarked: "It is enough that we are able to see the right thing to be done at the right moment, leaving to the justice, the liberality and the foresight of the British nation to provide the means of doing it."

No attempt was however made to add college-classes to the Anglo-Persian Department of the Calcutta Madrassa. But it was through his exertions that Muslim students got in 1873 facilities for receiving education at the Presidency College. In 1880 Syed Amir Hussain, Secretary, National Muhammadan Association and member, Bengal Council, published a brochure on Muhammadan education in which he raised with force the question of establishing a B. A. college in the compound of the Calcutta Madrassa, not with Government money but with money saved in the Mohsin Fund by pruning Madrassa education which, in his view, was no longer efficacious for Mussalmans, nor so

popular among them. He was supported whole-heartedly by the press of the day and by W.W. Hunter. But Sir Ashley Eden, the then Lt. Governor of Bengal, did not accept his contention that Madrassa education had lost popularity among Muslims. He however took steps to have the tuition fee of Muslim students reduced by two-thirds in the Calcutta colleges.

The National Muhammadan Association was a noteworthy institution of its time. In 1881 Rajnarain Bose, the veteran Adi Brahmo Samaj leader, referred to it thus: "As the Mussalmans have a National Muhammedan Association the Hindus too should have a Maha-Hindu Samity (National Hindu Association). We should have intercourse with Muhammedan and other Indian nations in political and such other affairs as far as practicable, but like a farmer cultivating a limited area and not the entire country we should have the Hindu society as our particular field of activity." Another noteworthy Muslim institution of the time was the Central Muhammadan Association with which Justice Syed Amir Ali was long connected.

1868, the year of the Wahhabi Trial, may be regarded as a decisive year for the Mussalmans of Bengal and India in as much as it witnessed on the one hand the dying embers of militant Wahhabism and on the other the beginning of the era of the Mussalmans' loyalty to and co-operation with the British way of governance. Their confusion and helplessness at this stage found expression in the following letter contributed to the Persian journal *Durbin* in 1869:

All sorts of employments, great and small, are being snatched away from the Muhammedans and bestowed on men of other races, particularly the Hindus. The Government is bound to look upon all classes of its subjects with an equal eye, yet the time has come when it publicly singles out the Muhammedans in its Gazette for exclusion from official posts. Recently when several vacancies occurred in

the office of the Sunderban's Commissioner, that official, in advertising them in Govt. Gazette, stated that the appointments should be given to none but Hindus. In short, the Muhammedans have sunk so low, that even when qualified for Govt. employ they are studiously kept out of it by Govt. notifications. Nobody takes any notice of their helpless condition and the higher authorities do not deign even to acknowledge their existence.

Hunter who wrote his book in England remarked on the letter as follows: "I have not at present the means of officially tracing and verifying the statement of the Persian journalist, but it attracted some notice at the time, and was not, so far as I heard, contradicted."

We have learnt of the Mussalman's changed attitude according to which India under the British was to be reckoned *Dar-ul-Islam* and not *Dar-ul-Harb*. Their political co-operation with the British commenced in right earnest, so to say, with the starting of the Central Muhammadan Association sometime after the inauguration of Sir Surendranath's Indian Association. Justice Syed Amir Ali was associated with it for some twenty years and the Association was responsible for the establishment of a number of *Anjumans* (Associations) throughout Bengal with their insistence on Muslim solidarity and preservation of their special rights and privileges. This was also the time when Sir Syed Ahmed of U. P. launched his activities at first against the Indian Association and subsequently against the Indian National Congress. According to Hali, the celebrated Urdu poet, patriot and Sir Syed's biographer, Sir Syed began his career as an Indian nationalist, but he went over to Muslim separatism in education and politics when in 1867 some Hindu leaders of Benares moved for the replacement of Urdu in Persian script by Hindi in Devnagri script as far as practicable. Muslim intelligentsia of the time and subsequent years were no doubt, dominated largely by

Nawab Abdul Latif, Sir Syed Ahmed, and Justice Syed Amir Ali, yet they felt curious about the Indian National Congress in some sessions of which their attendance was considerable, and there were also a few Muslim scholars and litterateurs like Mir Musaraff Hussain who pleaded for hearty amity and co-operation between Hindus and Mussalmans.

The Renaissance in Bengal, which started among the Hindus of the province early in the 19th century, went through various phases till it called forth, in the last quarter of the century, Revivalism also whose forces came to be almost evenly balanced with those of the Renaissance. We have seen Revivalism started among the Indian Mussalmans early in the 19th century; and though there were among them, gifted litterateurs like Hali and Mir Musaraff Hussain in the 19th century and Mrs. R. S. Hossain, Kazi Imdadul Haque, Lutfar Rahman, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Nazrul Islam and the Dacca Rationalists<sup>2</sup> early in this century, who represented, sometimes ably, the forces of Renaissance, yet the forces of Revivalism may be said to be still carrying the day not only among the Mussalmans of Bengal but among the Mussalmans of the Indian sub-continent.

#### NOTE

1. In the Petition to Government against Regulation III of 1828 for the resumption of *lakheraj* lands it was stated :  
 .....clause 1st., section IV of the Regulation in question, totally overlooking the solemn pledge contained in the preamble of Regulation XIX of 1793, has authorised a collector to institute enquiries in regard to land free of assessments, without previously obtaining the sanction of the Board of Revenue for such inquiry, as required in section 15, Regulation XIX and in article first, section V, Regulation II of 1819, and has transferred the 'force and effect' of a judicial decree to any decision that the collector may pass upon such enquiry against the present holder of the lands of the above description; that the second and third articles of the same section not only invest a collector with unrestrained power to adjudge any land in possession of individuals to be the property of govt., but give him further absolute authority 'to carry immediately into effect his decree by attaching and assessing the land' so adjudged, without being required to refer his decision to the higher authority for confirmation, as directed in section XX, Regulation II of 1819.

2. Vide the writer's *Creative Bengal* (Thacker Spink & Co.) and also his Bengali book *Banglar Jagaran* (Visvabharati Publication Department).

Bipinchandra Pal attended a meeting of the Dacca Rationalists in July 1928 and expressed his deep admiration for their activities thus : "I had no idea that such a body had been functioning in Bengal for some years. ....Muslim culture which is obviously an amalgam of Semitic, Iranian and other cultures affected Indian life substantially, so much so, that without its impact the advent of our mediaeval saints like Nanak, Kabir, Tukaram, Tulsidas and even Sri Chaitanya would not have been possible..... The tone that prevails here is not to be met with even in Aligarh."

## 33

### THE BRAHMO SAMAJ

*Jogananda Das*

“If I were to suggest a single word to describe the service the Brahmo Samaj has rendered during the nineteenth century to India and the world, that word would be Emancipation”. (Dr. F. C. Southworth.)

The Brahmo Samaj was founded by Rammohan Roy (1772-1833). Its birth and development is closely correlated with the birth and development of Modern India of which Rammohan is regarded as the ‘Father’. The Brahmo Samaj helped to emancipate India from mediaeval feudalism to national democracy, from blind faith and anti-social customs to knowledge and science, in a threefold emancipation: intellectual and religious, social and moral, and political.

#### *Extension and Dynamism*

The historical importance of the Brahmo Samaj can be judged by the growth of the Movement in the nineteenth century as shown in the following Table:

GROWTH OF THE BRAHMO SAMAJ IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Year.	Number of Samajes.	Year.	Number of Samajes.	Year.	Number of Samajes.
1828	1	1863	25	1883	141
1848	5	1868	47	1888	178
1853	9	1873	64	1893	192
1858	14	1878	86	1895	197



29 Samajes (Bengal, 9; Assam, 8; Orissa, 4; N.W. Provinces, 2; Western India, 1; Southern India, 5) have been omitted from the Table, since their years of foundation have not been given in the list appended to the *Report of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj for 1895*, from which the above Table has been compiled. Thus the total number of Brahmo Samajes in 1895 was  $197 + 29 = 226$ , extending from Peshawar in the north to Travancore in the south, from Beluchistan in the west to the Khasi Hills (Assam) and Rangoon (Burma) in the east. In the first ten years after Rammohan's death (1834-43), under the leadership of Pundit Ramchandra Vidyavagish there was only one unit. In the next fourteen years (1844-57), under the leadership of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, the number rose to 14, all in Bengal. In the next twenty years (1858-77), first under the joint leadership (1858-65) of the Maharshi and Keshubchandra Sen and then under Keshub alone (1866-77), 72 units were added all over India. In the next eighteen years (1878-95), after the birth of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj under the collective leadership of Pundit Sibnath Sastri, Anandamohan Bose and others, the number became 197, apart from the 29 of unknown date. The movement had reached its zenith.

It will be seen from the above that the Brahmo Samaj was a movement on an all-India scale. The Arya Samaj was founded in 1875, the Theosophical Society of India in 1879 and the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897. Brahmo Samaj was a pioneer national movement in the most comprehensive socio-cultural sense of the term.

### *The Comprehensive Character of Brahmoism*

The Movement started from anti-idolatrous religious reform. In his *Brahmunical Magazine*, Rammohan says: "We reject idolatry in every form under whatsoever veil of sophistry it may be practised either in adoration of artificial, natural or imaginary object. The divine homage we offer consists solely in the practice of *Daya* or benevolence towards each other and not in fanciful faith or in certain motions of feet,

arms, head, tongue or other bodily organs in a pulpit or before a temple" (Quoted by Sophia Dobson Collet: *Life and Letters of Raja Rammohan Roy*, Calcutta, 1913, p.80). Gradually, many other aspects came to be integrated into the religion of the Brahmo Samaj. Rammohan Roy himself in a letter to a friend in 1818 had pointed out that some changes in the religion of the Hindus were necessary "at least for their political advantage and social comfort".

The *Brahmo Public Opinion*, the first English organ of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, in its very first opening number (21 March 1878, p.2), says editorially: "We shall try to demonstrate that Brahmoism elevates people not only spiritually, but socially, intellectually, *physically and politically*, that Brahmoism not only affects our soul, but our hearts, our minds, and our social being as well..... Boldly and fearlessly we hope to teach and practice reform *in every direction, unmindful of consequences.*" (Italics added). Vithal Ram Sindhe, practically the founder of the Harijan Movement in India (1906), long before Mahatma Gandhi, and a missionary of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj as also of the Prarthana Samaj of Bombay, said in his speech as a delegate of the Brahmo Samaj to the Second International Council of Unitarian and other Liberal Religious Thinkers and Workers at Amsterdam in 1903: "A complete Brahmo is not satisfied with thought and feeling only. He is ever anxious to prove his religion to himself first and to the world afterwards. *His pulpit is not a place for exercising the ecstasies of soul, much less for spinning out theories about the Unseen*, but an open and active platform for *all manner of social Reform* which is at present the primary need of India." (*Religion and Liberty*, Amsterdam, 1904, p. 185. Italics added).

### *Class Character*

Out of the clash of cultures, Western and Indian, Brahmo Samaj emerged as the new synthesis of the age, responding

immediately to the needs of the class destined to rise to power in the new society.

Rammohan was not only the first in Asia to sympathise with the new republics of Europe and America replacing feudal monarchies and colonial empires, but as early as the twenties of the last century, he recognised the changing class character of society. He said, from a study of world history, that wherever the "new middling class" had come into power, freedom had followed in its footsteps. Feudal age was also destined to pass away from India, handing over power to the rising new middle class, to bourgeois democracy.

The Brahmo Samaj was the first endeavour from *within* the society to pull India out of the morass of mediaeval feudalism and help place her on her feet in line with modern thought currents, its immediate vehicle of expression being the new rising "middling class" of Bengal and then of India. That is why in its initial stage the Brahmo Samaj got such an enthusiastic response from the intelligentsia, the merchants and the new feudal-bourgeois zemindars of the British regime (as distinct from the pure-feudal zemindars who were going out of picture one after another in quick succession due to an epidemic of auctions by the East India Company of the *lakheraj* or rent-free estates).

The membership lists of the Adi Brahmo Samaj and the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* (founded in 1839 by the Maharshi) reveal a good admixture of middle-class intelligentsia and the new zemindars and are an interesting study from the view point of class character of the movement in its early period.

It was in the beginning of the seventies of the last century that the Brahmo Samaj began to show some tendencies of penetrating even into the proletarians. The British Government in India took precautionary action. The Brahmo Samaj, by a single legal code devised by them, was isolated from the Indian society, and its topmost leader was by Government agency linked up with a feudal prince.

### *Idolatry, Feudalism and the Brahmo Samaj*

The foresight of Rammohan Roy becomes evident when the relationship between idolatry and feudalism is considered. Idolatry and iconolatry are a bulwark of feudalism as well as of decadent capitalism. The Idol or the Icon means (1) offerings in kind or money (tributes to the gods), and (2) a priesthood. Gradually, as the money accumulates, big estates grow up round the idols or the icons (either of gods or of man-gods), and a priestly class with vested interests grows stronger and stronger. In the mediaeval period, they wielded almost absolute power with their fabulous wealth, vast properties and steady incomes. In India, particularly the South, these religious monarchies, with the hierarchy of *mohunts*, were powers to be reckoned with. In order to keep these feudal religious empires as smoothly running corners, it was the duty and the business of the priests to keep the masses steeped in ignorance, superstitions and blind belief.

The Brahmo Samaj, in waging war against idolatry, hit at the very root of this ages-old religious feudalism, emancipating the intellect of the people from the thraldom of the priestly classes. In the twentieth century, with the weakening of the Brahmo Samaj and similar movements, idolatry is trying to come again in a new garb of vested interests, back to superstition, traditionalism, ritualism and blind belief, as a strong ally of decadent capitalism and an enemy of the 'socialist pattern'.

### *Birth of the Brahmo Samaj*

Rammohan Roy was fully conscious of idolatry, with its elaborate ritualism and the laws of *prayaschitta* (expiation or atonement) dictated by the priests, as a great impediment to social and political progress. Therefore, instead of merely waging a *negative* war like the Derozians, Rammohan also gave a positive synthesis in the shape of his 'Universal Religion', the religion of the Brahmo Samaj.

Through a deep study of the scriptures of different religions—Hindu, Mahomedan and Christian—Rammohan became

convinced that behind the idolatry of the East and the iconolatry, iconodulism or the trinity of the West stands only one great Reality—the Supreme Being, the ‘Author and Preserver of the Universe’—whom men of all religions worship under different names, with different forms, symbols and rituals. *Una est religio rituum varietate*; religion is one, rituals vary. It is these rituals—“certain motions of the feet, arms, head, tongue, or other bodily organs in a pulpit or before a temple”—centering round some idols, icons or other outward symbols, that divide man from man, sect from sect, religion from religion.

So, if these outward forms with their exclusive rituals be removed and replaced by the One Supreme Being in Spirit or the formless God Who is the common object of worship of all the established religions, then there will be one nation in India and one humanity in the world.

For this, no person will have to change his religion from one into another, no religion to lose its identity or individuality. Every religion will just have to travel inwards from the outer ritualistic periphery of ‘fanciful faith’ to the Central Truth, which is but One,—the only ‘offerings’ to the Deity being “*Daya* or benevolence towards each other”,—not flowers, fruits, animals, money, etc.

Thus a Hindu while remaining a Hindu will become a True Hindu, a Christian while remaining a Christian will become a True Christian, a Mussalman while remaining a Mussalman will become a True Mussalman, and so on, all combining together in a common *universal* brotherhood of man and fatherhood of God. All men, while remaining within their respective religions will, following the way of Rammohan, automatically become and *feel* like *biradars* (brothers), the favourite endearing term used by Rammohan. All the sacred scriptures of the world, truly interpreted, point but to that one Central Truth,—the Church Universal or the ‘Universal Religion’ of Rammohan Roy. The ‘Universal Religion’ of the Brahmo Samaj is no separate

religion, but an Universal Principle, a critique to be applied to every existing religion through its own scriptures.

Rammohan Roy, in order to apply his anti-idolatrous 'universal' unitarian principle to the Hindu religion, started a discussion meeting, a society called *Atmiya Sabha* ('Society of Kindred Souls') in Calcutta in 1815 where, apart from religious subjects, social and educational matters were also discussed, like the *suttee*, widow remarriage, child marriage, polygamy, English education etc. In order to apply his universal principle to Christianity, Rammohan started, with the help of his Christian unitarian disciple Rev. William Adam, at first a Christian Unitarian Council, then a Mission and finally in 1827 a Chapel where Rev. Adam used to preach. But this exotic Christian unitarian experiment failed.

Then, on the advice of two of his young Hindu unitarian disciples, Tarachand Chakrabarti and Chandrasekhar Deb, Rammohan started the Brahmo Samaj in a rented house, known as Feringhee Kamal Bose's house, in Calcutta on 6th *Bhadra*, 1750 *Saka* (20 August 1828), with Pundit Ramchandra Vidyavagish as its Minister. This new experiment at once succeeded and the congregation began to increase rapidly. A plot of land was purchased for a permanent *Mandir* (Chapel) of the Samaj on the Upper Chitpore Road near the Tagores' family residence in Jorasanko. A public Trust Deed of the Brahmo Samaj was executed on 8 January 1830 and the *mandir* of the Brahmo Samaj was consecrated on the 11th *Magh*, 1751 *Saka* (January 1830). Tarachand Chakrabarti, a leader of Young Bengal, became the first Secretary of the Brahmo Samaj at the age of 24 only. Both the dates, 6th *Bhadra* and 11th *Magh*, are still observed as the anniversary festivals by all the Brahmo Samajes, the latter date being the chief one.

At first (1) a Brahmin used to chant the Vedas from an adjoining room separated by a screen from the mixed congregation (of all castes) in the main chamber (as no orthodox Vedic pundit would agree in those days to read aloud

the texts of the Vedas in the hearing of anybody but the Brahmins); (2) Vedic and Vedanta texts were explained in the vernacular (regarded 'profane' in those days by the pundits), Bengali, before the mixed congregation in a sermon called *Vyakhyan*; (3) unitarian devotional hymns, composed in Bengali, by Rammohan and his disciples and set to classical tunes were sung by Brahmin artists in accompaniment to *pakhowaj* and *tabla* (high-class Indian time-beating instruments) played by Muslim musicians and followed by Eurasian Christians singing David's psalms. This Hindu-Muslim-Christian participation in a Temple of God was an unique experiment, never done before 1828, in the world history of religion. Rammohan used to gather Christian and Muslim children also in the Brahmo Samaj and taught them his 'Universal Religion'.

Shortly after the establishment of the Brahmo Samaj, Rammohan Roy departed for England; he died in Bristol on 27 September 1833. After his death, the Brahmo Samaj began to wane and survived chiefly due to the single-souled devotion of Ramchandra Vidyavagish, the Minister of the Samaj. The movement began to revive again when taken up by the next great leader, Maharshi Debendranath Tagore (father of the poet Rabindranath, and son of 'Prince' Dwarakanath, friend and disciple of Rammohan Roy).

*Adi Brahmo Samaj: first period (1844-1857)*

At first, it was known as the Calcutta Brahmo Samaj but later renamed *Adi* (meaning original) Brahmo Samaj (by which name it is popularly known), after the establishment of the Bharatvarshiya Brahmo Samaj by Keshub-chandra Sen in 1866.

The Maharshi gave the Brahmo Samaj a purely Hindu 'national' character based on Hindu non-idolatrous unitarian scriptures only, the Vedas and the Vedanta (the Upanishads), which were regarded as infallible. The religion of the Brahmo Samaj was popularly known as *vedanta pratipadya satya dharma* or the true religion as expounded

in the Vedānta. Pressed by the younger rationalist section headed by Akshoykumar Datta, the infallibility of the Vedas and then of the Vedānta was discarded and the religion was henceforth known as Brahmo Dharma or Brahmoism. The first Brahmo 'scripture', drawn up by the Maharshi and called *Brahmo Dharma*, was compiled from the non-idolatrous portions of the Hindu scriptures with some changes. *Brahmo Dharma Veeja* (the seeds or fundamentals of Brahmoism) was also written by him. He also formulated the non-idolatrous Brahmo rituals based again on Hindu scriptures.

The Maharshi introduced a Covenant, revised in 1950, also the system of initiation or *deeksha*. He, along with twenty other young Brahmos, was initiated into Brahmoism by Pundit Ramchandra Vidyavagish on 7th *Poush*, 1765 *Saka* (1843). This date was observed as an anniversary by Rabindranath Tagore in his school at Santiniketan (where the Visvabharati stands to-day). Santiniketan was a creation of the Maharshi originally as a religious retreat, made into a public Trust.

The Assistant Ministers of the Adi Brahmo Samaj, called *Upacharyas* (the only Minister or *Acharya* being the Maharshi himself) were Brahmins.

The chief contributions of the Adi Brahmo Samaj to the country were (1) to check the spread of Christian proselytism, and (2) to bring back the English-educated youth blindly imitating the Western ways and manners to a national culture. Brahmoism began to be regarded as the 'national' religion of the educated Hindus. In fact, *the Adi Brahmo Samaj is the first organisation in India on these lines*, without denying the benefits of English education. There was a third and the most important contribution, namely, to emancipate the Hindu mind completely from the bondage of scriptures by rejecting their infallibility. The Maharshi based the Brahmo religion (regarded in those days as the true Hindu religion) *not on traditional scriptures* but on "a pure heart illuminated with knowledge and



strengthened with faith." The movement began to spread rapidly in Bengal. The medium of propagation was Bengali with the solitary exception of Harischandra Mukherjee of the indigo rebellion fame who preached in English.

*Second Period: the Maharshi and Keshub*(1858-65)

Then came Keshubchandra Sen, the living and rolling ball of fire that spread the conflagration from one end of India to another. Keshub was the greatest orator of the nineteenth century. Wherever he went, whether in India or in England, he held the audience spellbound for hours together. Men came to scoff and went back converted.

Keshub joined the Brahmo Samaj in 1857 when he was still in his teens and met the Maharshi in 1858. At once a strong attachment was formed between the two. The Maharshi at last found the man after his heart. Keshub's mastery over Bengali as well as over the English language helped greatly to spread the message of the Brahmo Samaj in and outside Bengal. The *Tattvabodhini Sabha* was now found unnecessary as a 'missionary organisation' and was abolished in 1859.

Keshub was a serious sincere young man of a deeply religious nature, bubbling over with vitality and energy. A young man himself, like Derozio, he at once became the centre and leader of the younger group in the Brahmo Samaj. He began to issue a series of pamphlets in English entitled *Young Bengal, this is for you* which took the youth by storm. For the second time in history, Young Bengal rose to action, far more dynamic, daring and sustaining than the Young Bengal of the Derozio period. The fire of the original Derozians had of course already died down.

The approach of the Maharshi to Brahmoism was from the Hindu scriptures; the approach of Keshub was from the Christian angle. He was deeply imbued with the Christian spirit of living faith and the contagion caught. Strict

adherence to truth, morality and purity, to live according to profession, a strong sense of sin and the imperative need of repentance and prayer, not only became subjects of constant discussion among the young group, turning into firm conviction, but also an indomitable will grew for translating the convictions into practice. This group was formed into a *Sangat Sabha*, a term given by the Maharshi in imitation of the Sikh *Sangats*.

The first expression of the new spirit came as a revolt against caste. Since all were children of God, there could not be any caste distinction in the Brahmo Samaj. Why should only Brahmins with the 'sacred thread' or the *upabit* sit on the pulpit?

The Maharshi, with great eclat appointed Keshub, a non Brahmin, as a Minister of the Brahmo Samaj over the heads of the *upacharyas* on 13 April 1862, himself remaining Chief Minister or the *Pradhanacharya*. No Brahmins with the sacred thread were to occupy the pulpit. There was a stir of suppressed dissatisfaction. While on the pulpit they took off the *upabit*, but while at home they put it on.

Once in motion, the inspired youth could not stop. At first they arranged an inter-caste marriage in secrecy, then, another openly which was a widow re-marriage as well. This was too much for the orthodox section who somehow caught the ear of the Maharshi. He, in his right of the sole surviving Trustee of the Samaj, again put the Brahmins with the *upabit* on the pulpit. The breach between the old and the young began to widen. The Maharshi wanted to carry both the sections with him, holding that both had equal rights in the Samaj.

However, Debendranath himself was for sometime past getting uneasy with the tendencies of Keshub and wanted to guide the Brahmo Samaj purely on Hindu lines. He was strict and uncompromising only on the matter of idolatry, but on all others including social reform (which he believed

would come gradually), he wanted the Samaj to follow Hindu laws and customs in order to establish it firmly amidst the Hindu society. He was uneasy about the new inclination towards Christian ideas as seen in Keshub's lecture on Christ. The intercaste marriage served as the last straw.

The young progressive Brahmos objected to the reinstatement of the Brahmins with *upabit* on the pulpit, but the objections were overruled by right of trusteeship. The young radicals under Keshubchandra Sen then seceded and formed a new Samaj—the Bharatvarshiya Brahmo Samaj or the Brahmo Samaj of India—in 1866. The *Mandir* was built in 1869 and consecrated on *6th Bhadra*; it still stands at 95 Mechuabazar Street (now Keshub Sen Street), Calcutta.

Though separated, the mutual regard of the Maharshi and the Brahmananda (the Maharshi had given to Keshub this title as one whose delight is in God) for each other was never lost. After this incident, the Maharshi gradually retired from active life in the Adi Brahmo Samaj and got deeply immersed in his personal spiritual endeavours.

### *The Brahmo Samaj of India*

Now started a glorious era for the Brahmo Samaj under Keshub. The worship in the new Samaj was made more catholic and popular. More Bengali and less Sanskrit was used. In place of *Brahmo Dharma*, a compilation from Hindu texts only, a new compilation was made and published in 1866, entitled *Slokasangraha* or collection of texts compiled from different scriptures, Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Jewish etc. These were read with their translation in the public worship, a practice followed more than half a century later by Mahatma Gandhi in his daily prayer meetings.

A Bengali journal named *Dharmatattva* was started by the new Samaj bearing, as its motto, the following stanza reflecting the universal spirit of the Brahmo Samaj:

*subisalam idam viswam pavitram brahma mandiram;  
chetah suniramalam tirtham satyam sastra anaswaram;  
viswaso dharmamulan hi pritih paramasadhanam;  
swarthanastu vairagyam brahmaireban prakirtitam.*

This wide universe is the sacred temple of God,  
The pure heart is the only holy place for pilgrimage,  
Truth is the one eternal scripture,  
Faith is the root of religion,  
Love, the highest discipline,  
Destruction of selfish interest is true asceticism.

The *Indian Mirror*, at first a weekly and then turned into a daily paper, served as the English organ. A strong band of missionaries under Keshub, infused with the spirit of the above proclamation and fired with apostolic zeal, was formed. A *jehad* was declared against caste. The Brahmins among the Brahmos, headed by the saintly Bijoykrishna Goswami, a direct descendant of Adwaita the premier disciple and friend of Chaitanya, began to openly discard their *upabits* one after another and called on the Brahmins of the country to do so.

Persecution started as never before in recent history. *Decksha* (initiation) into Brahmoism meant a baptism of fire. Young Brahmos were severely beaten and driven out of paternal homes. They were disinherited. When Bijoykrishna Goswami, the young Brahmo missionary, went to his native village Santipore to preach Brahmoism, he was pounced upon by the villagers, smeared all over with treacle (*chitay gur*), and wasps were set on his body. Goswamiji smiled and said: "As a result of this incident, a Brahmo mandir (a Brahmo chapel) will be raised in Santipore"; his prophecy was fulfilled. Umeschandra Datta, another saintly person and principal, City College, was worshipping God with his eyes shut in the Harinabhi Brahmo Samaj; he was bodily lifted and thrown into a thorny bush outside the *mandir*. There was even a case of poisoning for the sin of attending the public worship in a Brahmo Samaj; fortunately the victim survived. Brahmo *mandirs* were set on fire at many

places. The utter privations in which the Brahmo missionaries lived and preached are reminiscent of the early days of Christianity.

Keshub's name became a terror to the orthodox Hindu society. The Hindu would tolerate many things, but not interference with the timehonoured caste on which Brahminism stands. Fall of the caste system means fall of Brahminism. Dr. Alexander Duff, the famous Scotch missionary of the nineteenth century, admitted: "The Brahmo Samaj is a power of no mean order". The new Young Bengal of social revolutionaries created by Keshub is a glorious chapter in our national history.

The greater the persecution, the wider did the Brahmo Movement spread into the far corners of India, and it now began to show tendencies to penetrate into the proletarians.

When Keshub returned from England after creating a stir over there, he started the Indian Reform Association in 1870 with five sections: charity, temperance, women's education, mass education, and cheap literature.

Under mass education, free night schools for labour were started. Sasipada Banerji, a young Brahmo initiated by Keshub, had already started such a night school at Baranagore, a suburb of Calcutta, for the millhands, as also a Workingmens' Club, an 'Anna Bank' for them, as well as a Brahmo Samaj. He also started a Widows' Home where widows could live, learn and earn, the first of its kind in India. A Social Reform Association was started in Bombay by the Prarthana Samaj (the Brahmo Samaj of Western India). Messages of the Brahmo Samaj began to reach labour.

In the cheap literature section, a one-pice Bengali weekly (the cheapest in India) named *Sulabh Samachar* was started in 1870 by the Indian Reform Association. It called on the downtrodden classes—contemptibly called the *chhotalog* (literally, the small folk)—menials, labourers and peasants—to rise and organise themselves against the tyrannies and oppression

of the rich, and declared that the *Sulabh Samachar* was their paper. It severely criticised British officials, using satirical style. Circulation rapidly mounted. Keshub also began to preach Brahmoism in the simplest Bengali in *Bazaars*.

W. W. Hunter states in his *Statistical Account of Bengal* (part IV, p. 54) regarding the district of Burdwan: "The Collector, however, in his report to me in 1870, roughly estimated the total number of Brahmoes at above one-eighth of the whole District population." Even if this estimate were exaggerated, it is a sure proof that the Brahmo Movement was penetrating appreciably into villages, among the peasants and artisans.

Bijoykrishna Goswami initiated in Baganchra nearly one hundred villagers in a lump into Brahmoism, many of whom were vendors of vegetables at the *bazaar*. Ananda Swami and Kalinarayan Gupta, influential Brahmo zemindars of East Bengal, preached Brahmoism in their zemindaries, the latter composing folk songs and converting his servants, *paiks* and *burkandazes* (peons and sentries) into Brahmoism. On the 11th *Magh* festival, the most saintly and respected Brahmo Samaj, the congregation coming to join in the Kaoraid (the main seat of zemindary of Kalinarayan Gupta) Brahmo Samaj, the congregation coming to join in the divine service were surprised to see Kalinarayan's menial servant on the pulpit and the zemindar and master who was also a great devotee sitting at the foot of the pulpit.

Sasipada Banerji started in 1874 *Bharat Sramajeebi* (the 'Indian Labourer'), the first labour journal of India in which Sibnath Sastri wrote a poem, beginning with "Awake, Arise, O Workingman". Its circulation quickly reached 15,000, a phenomenal figure in those days. While in England with his wife Rajkumari Banerji (the first Indian lady to cross the seas), Sasipada, in 1870, had tried to get a Labour Act for India passed, but failed. Sasipada also organised mill hands of Baranagar into processions of *nagar sankirtan*,

singing Brahmo hymns, which used to join the *Maghotsava* festival every year, parading the streets for miles together.

The caste system of India has been a boon to the British Government from the very beginning. As early as the second decade of the last century, a member of the Court of Directors said in a Board meeting in London that the caste system was a 'Godsend' for the Company and must not be disturbed. Even Sir Henry Cotton, I. C. S., President of the National Congress in 1904, while sympathising with our national movement, highly eulogised the caste system. To preserve the caste system has always been a British policy in India.

Therefore, the vehement anti-caste crusade of the Brahmo Samaj not only evoked strong opposition from the orthodox Hindu society but was also not very pleasing to the Government. At the new tendency of the Brahmo Samaj to spread into labour areas and the villages, the British vested interest in India was even more alarmed.

A British planter, Robert H. Elliot, in his book *Concerning John's Indian Affairs* published from London in 1872, compared the Brahmo Samaj with a live volcano, and warned the Government: the Brahmo Samaj was "spreading at such a rate as must inevitably prove speedily fatal to our present system of Indian administration" (p. 195). He further said that in comparison with the Brahmo Samaj, the Wahhabi movement was mere 'chaff'. (Ibid). The Government which was already feeling uneasy about the trend of the Brahmo Movement took the warning.

The intercaste marriages which were steadily increasing in the Brahmo Samaj needed to be legalised. At the request of Keshubchandra Sen, the Government introduced a bill for the Brahmos (1) legalising such marriages; (2) making monogamy obligatory; and (3) fixing the minimum age for the bride at 14 and for the bridegroom at 18. The Adi Brahmo Samaj raised objections on the ground that Brahmo

marriages were Hindu marriages and were perfectly valid; therefore they did not need the protection of any special Act. The Government quickly availed themselves of the opportunity of this dispute between the two sections and added a most pernicious clause to the original Bill and got it passed as the Native Marriage Act or Act III of 1872. This clause required both the bride and bridegroom to declare: "I am not a Hindu, not a Mussalman, not a Christian". Thus, by a single stroke of the pen, the Government isolated the Brahmo Samaj from the body politic of Indian society defeating the very purpose envisaged by Raja Rammohan Roy.

It was a blow, the severity of which took some time to be felt, due to the inner vitality and dynamism of the Movement. For a time, in response to this Act, a 'Not-a-Hindu' spirit began to assert itself among the progressive Brahmos, corrected only much later. It was this psychology that is responsible for considering Brahmoism as a *separate* religion, a deviation from Rammohan and the Maharshi. On the other hand, an aggressive 'Yes-a-Hindu' mentality began to assert itself with a vengeance in the Adi Brahmo Samaj. Rajnarain Bose, its President, delivered his famous lecture on the Superiority of Hinduism. The later Neo-Hinduism and 'Hindu nationalism' were direct products chiefly of this aggressive Hindu psychology of the Adi Brahmo Samaj arising out of the Marriage Act controversy, as well as of the non-aggressive and purely constructive Chaitra Mela, *alias* Jatiya (national) Mela. The Hindu Mela starting from 1867 was inspired by Rajnarain Bose and chiefly organised by Nabagopal Mitra or 'National' Mitra, Ganendranath Tagore and Manomohan Bose,—all of the Adi Brahmo Samaj. Sasadhar Tarkachuramoni, *Anandamath* of Bankim etc. are of much later date, after the advent of the Theosophical Society in India. It is significant that the original Chaitra Mela changed its name to Hindu Mela during the above Marriage Act controversy.



The Christo-centric tendency now began to crystalise more prominently in Keshub. Already a *bhakti* (emotional-devotional) movement had started in the Brahmo Samaj led by Keshub and Bijoy. *Nagar Sankirtan* (big street processions singing devotional *Kirtan* songs in accompaniment of Vaishnavic time-beating instruments, *khole* and *kartal*) began to parade the highways of Calcutta and mofussil,—a novelty at that period,—greatly popularising the movement among the masses. The first *nagar-sankirtan* began with a famous song: “men and women, irrespective of caste, have equal rights.” Emotional outbursts began to be exhibited. A section of Brahmos in the mofussil in their emotional exuberance, mixed with Christo-centric sentiments, began to regard Keshub as a Messiah, prostrated themselves at his feet and entreated him to arrange for their salvation.

The younger and rationalist section (all disciples of Keshub) began to get restless. They demanded a constitution and democratic government for the Bharatvarshiya Brahmo Samaj. A resolution was carried declaring God as the President of the Samaj, Keshub as the Secretary, and Pratapchandra Majumdar, a friend and relation of Keshub and next in importance, a great orator and a saintly person, as the Assistant Secretary. But the constitution was not yet forthcoming. Dissatisfaction was brewing and growing.

At such a critical juncture, the Government struck a second and more severe blow at the movement.

Noting the anti-caste ‘levelling’ attitude and the ‘mass’ tendency of the Brahmo Movement, and in order to arrest its growing power, the Government wanted to link it up permanently with a feudal power. They negotiated a marriage between the eldest daughter of Keshub and a feudal prince, the young Maharaja of Cooch Behar (1877). This negotiation was neither accidental nor ‘Providential’ but a well-planned and deliberate move on the part of the Government to break the Brahmo Movement. The ‘mass-wise’ trend of the Brahmo Samaj had to be curbed.

For, the democratically and radically-minded Young Brahmos led by Pundit Sibnath Sastri, Anandamohan Bose, Dwarkanath Ganguli, Sisirkumar Ghosh, Motilal Ghosh of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (the young Ghosh brothers were at that time staunch and aggressive Brahmos) and others—along with their friend and close associate Surendranath Banerji (son of Dr. Durgacharan Banerji, a prominent member of *Tattvabodhini Sabha*) had begun already to form progressive political societies to agitate for middle-class interests as well as for the interests of the *ryots*. By 1875-76, the Young Brahmos took leading parts in forming *Ryot Unions* and *Peoples' Associations* in Burdwan, Murshidabad, Dacca, Barisal, Krishnagar, Jessore etc. The Indian League was formed by the young Ghosh brothers in 1875 to co-ordinate their activities, and in 1876 the Indian Association was founded by Sibnath Sastri, Anandamohan Bose, Nagendranath Chatterji, Dwarkanath Ganguli, and other Young Brahmos along with their constant companion Surendranath Banerji who was once reported by the London correspondent of the *Indian Examiner*, in connection with one of his lectures in London in 1869, as "one of the higher caste Brahmos" (quoted in the *Indian Mirror*, 12 November 1869, p. 676).

The British Government was dealing with an idealist, a religious and moral leader—Keshubchandra Sen who had infinite trust in the honesty and goodness of the British. Taking advantage of that trust, the British, in order to discredit Keshub and the Brahmo Samaj in the public eye, gave him an assurance which they never meant to keep.

### *A Pledge Broken and the Inevitable Breach*

The young Maharaja belonged to a Hindu tribal family with an idolatrous tradition, particularly among the ladies of the household. The Brahmo Samaj was born to do away with idolatry "under whatever veil of sophistry," and Keshubchandra Sen was at that time its greatest leader. So, Keshub wanted an assurance from the Government and *made*

*it a condition of the marriage* that there must not be any idolatrous rituals in the wedding ceremony. *The Government of India gave that promise, never meaning to honour it.* Because they could not and they knew it. Religious neutrality being a publicly declared policy of the British Government, they would not interfere or did not mean to interfere with any idolatrous rituals the ladies of the princely household might perform according to old family traditions in connection with the wedding. The only concession allowed *at the last moment* was the freedom of the bride not to go through any such rituals. But marriage is a solemn *joint* ceremony of the bride and the bridegroom, and not an individual affair; idolatrous acts performed by one party to the marriage did not *morally* absolve the other party of all responsibility in the affair, particularly in view of the strict principles in which the young radical Brahmos had always been scrupulously trained by Keshub himself. It was for such a new moral tradition that the Brahmo Samaj was respected and recognised as a power not only in India but in Europe and America as well. Any compromise, direct or indirect, on a matter of principles for which the Young Brahmos were fighting meant a serious compromise for the Brahmo Samaj itself before the whole world.

And so, the inevitable happened, as Government wanted it to happen. The Samaj split into two on a matter of principle, resulting in the loss to the Movement of its greatest leader, Keshubchandra Sen, who henceforth immersed himself in spiritual meditations, removed from the vitally needed platforms of social and political reform.

To the protesters against the marriage, the young radical Brahmos, the choice lay between Keshub whom they all revered, and the principles and prestige of the Brahmo Samaj which must be upheld. The latter won. With heavy hearts the younger group headed by Sibnath, Ananda-mohan and others decided to establish a separate Brahmo Samaj on purely democratic lines, in which there would be

no danger of the Leader becoming the Law. Night after night they spent in deep anguish and earnest prayer before breaking away from their highly esteemed chief; at last on 2nd *Jyaistha*, 1800 *Saka* (15 May 1878) in a public meeting at the Town Hall, Calcutta, was formed the Sadharan or the Republican Brahmo Samaj. In 1881 (10th *Magh*, 1802 *Saka*) was consecrated the *Mandir* of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj at 211, Cornwallis Street, Calcutta.

### *Sadharan Brahmo Samaj: Its Constitution*

The Adi Brahmo Samaj was administered by Maharshi Debendranath Tagore in his exclusive right of sole trusteeship of the Samaj. In the Brahmo Samaj of India, church matters were finally decided by the personal inspiration and intuition of Kshubchandra Sen. The leaders of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj like Pundit Sibnath Sastri, Anandamohan Bose, Bijoykrishna Goswami, Nagendranath Chatterji, Umeshchandra Datta, Sibchandra Deb and others made it their first objective to make a Trust Deed for the new Samaj and rest it on a democratic Constitution. The Constitution was drafted by Anandamohan Bose, a Bar-at-Law and the first Cambridge Wrangler of India, with a view to make it a model for the future Constitution of Independent India.

*At least in one point it has served as a model.* The Constitution of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, a religious society, did recognise the principle of *universal adult franchise*, irrespective of sex, occupation, income or other specific qualifications, seventy years before it was accepted in the Constitution of Free India, and at a time when the principle was not recognised by many countries of Europe, including England.

### *Democracy and nationalism*

The *Samadarshi* Group (1874) led by Sibnath Sastri had demanded democracy in church government, finalised at last in the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. Sastri says that the Indian Association, a political democratic society (1876)

and the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, a religious democratic society (1878) were like twins, the same persons creating both, the same procedure followed in both. In fact the history of nationalism and democracy in India is closely interlinked with the history of the Brahmo Samaj. This has been briefly but admirably explained by Bipinchandra Pal in his *Brahmo Samaj and the battle for Swaraj* which thus begins: "The present generation of youthful intellectuals seem to fancy that the great freedom movement in India is of very recent origin and growth. They have little or no idea that the fight for freedom has been going on for quite a hundred years. And in this fight, *for more than sixty years, the Brahmo Samaj has taken the lead*". (Italics added).

The ideas of democracy and freedom so much possessed the leaders of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj that its official Bengali organ, *Tattvakaumudi* publicly declared in 1882, three years before the birth of the Indian National Congress, that the Brahmo Samaj "by placing justice over injustice, equality over inequality, *power of the people over the King*, is making arrangements to establish a *Worldwide Republic*. This *all-sided* attitude is a matter of special pride for the Brahmo Samaj. It is for this spirit of independence that many people are flocking in here". (Italics added).

First in the formation of the Indian Association and other progressive political bodies, and then since the birth of the Indian National Congress till the Swadeshi Movement of Bengal in the beginning of the present century, the leaders of the Brahmo Samaj or the Prarthana Samaj have taken a dominant role in the national movement. As in the case of the Brahmo Samaj, so in the case of the national movement, the spirit, ideas and ideals flowed from Bengal over all India. It is not for nothing that Gokhale said during the Swadeshi movement of Bengal: "What Bengal thinks to-day, India will do to-morrow".

The Sadharan Brahmo Samaj contributed to the Swadeshi movement of Bengal many leaders like Pundit Sibnath

Sastri (who presided, while others dared not, over the public meeting congratulating the first batch of political deportees), Anandamohan Bose, Bipinchandra Pal, Krishnakumar Mitra, Sachindraprasad Bose (student leader), Ramakanta Roy, Manomohan Chakravarti, Manoranjan Guha Thakurta, Lalitmohan Das, Nibaranchandra Roy, Acharya Prafullachandra Roy, Dr. Nilratan Sarkar, Dr. Sundarimohan Das, Dr. Prankrishna Acharya and others. Aswinikumar Datta used to conduct divine service at the Barisal Brahmo Samaj. The multiple contribution of the great poet Rabindranath Tagore of the Adi Brahmo Samaj, its Secretary in 1895, later on its President in the beginning of the present century, is too well known to be mentioned here.

Regarding the first Revolutionary Party during the Swadeshi movement, Dr. Bhupendranath Datta, a prominent leader of the Party and the youngest brother of Swami Vivekananda says: "Many will feel surprised to-day to learn that there was a deep influence of the Brahmo Samaj on some of the first batch of members in the Revolutionary Party of Bengal. At that time we took a statistical estimate and found that many of the prominent revolutionaries either belonged to the Brahmo Samaj or grew up under the shadow of the Brahmo Samaj". (*Aprakasita Rajnaitik Itihas* or 'Unpublished Political History', 2nd edition, 1928, p. 8. Translated from original Bengali). *Jugantar*, the fiery seditious journal of the secret Revolutionary Party, derived its name from a popular novel of the same name by Sibnath Sastri.

From religious revolutionaries to social revolutionaries (Keshub's period), and finally to political revolutionaries (Sadharan Brahmo Samaj) was a natural development in the history of the Brahmo Samaj.

It is interesting to note how large, proportionately, was the contribution of the Brahmo Samaj to the National Movement, if we consider the fact that the total number of

Brahmos in Bengal at that time did not exceed four thousand against the total population of Bengal which was more than seventy millions.

### *Social Reform*

The Sadharan Brahmo Samaj carried on social reform initiated by Keshub. But its special contribution was women's emancipation in Bengal with higher education including economic freedom for them. The leaders in this activity were Dwarakanath Ganguli, Durgamohan Das, Anandamohan Bose, Sibnath Sastri, Nabakanta Chatterji, Baradacharan Haldar, Saradacharan Haldar and others. The Sadharan Brahmo Samaj recognised complete equality of woman with man not in theory only but also in practice.

For the first time in the history of Bengal, women, without forsaking their national culture, received franchise equally with men, became graduates of the Calcutta University and medical graduates, doctors and midwives. For the first time, respectable ladies who were *purdanashin* discarded the *purdah*, mixed with men on equal terms, joined political and other movements, became ministers of religion and preached to men, formed societies among themselves and with men, conducted educational institutions, joined the Congress and became delegates, delivered extempore lectures in public meetings, sang at home and in public, crossed the seas and went to Europe, and lastly but not the least could choose their own husbands and had their voices respected by the parents in the choice of husbands.

In short, the social emancipation of women in Bengal, including co-education and higher education, started in full swing under the auspices of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. Female literacy in the Brahmo Samaj, according to Census, reached over 80%, the highest in India.

These bold and courageous women, mostly of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, who defied all social opposition and public ridicule, are the forerunners of our free and emancipated

women of to-day and initiated a glorious chapter in the social history of Bengal. Gandhiji only intensified what these pioneers of the Brahmo Samaj started with many a tear. (For detailed history read *Banglar Nari Jagaran* by Prabhat-chandra Ganguli, Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, Calcutta).

### *Educational Activities*

The Sadharan Brahmo Samaj was established in 1878, and the City School, soon developing into a college, was formed in 1879 by Anandamohan Bose and others. The institution was handed over to the Brahmo Education Society. The City College, in addition to the regular curriculum introduced (1) industrial (carpentry) class, (2) physical culture and (3) moral training, as *special* features. Lord Ripon, in opening the College building on 10 December 1884 said that these were *new* experiments in the history of education in India. He mentioned the carpentry class as a "forward step in the direction of technical education." He further said: "I hope that throughout India other men will be found to imitate the work which is here so successfully being done by those who conduct the institution." (*A Brief History of the City College from 1879 to 1904*, p. ii). The Brahmo Girls School was founded in 1891 by Sibnath Sastri. The Sadharan Brahmo Samaj became the owner. This school also introduced extra-curricular subjects like cooking, sewing and domestic hygiene and thus became a forerunner of future girls' schools with these subjects. A kindergarten school was started in the nineties of the last century and a Montesseri department was opened. They too were new ventures in the line and are the forerunners of the nursery schools of today.

Many of the two hundred and more Brahmo Samajes all over India had Sunday moral training schools attached to them. In fact, from Rammohan, the Maharshi and the Brahmananda, spread of education with moral training had been a special feature of the Brahmo movement. Numerous schools were founded by Brahmos all over Bengal. It was said that



wherever a Brahmo went, in one pocket he carried a Brahmo Samaj, in another a school.

### *Philanthropy*

The history of philanthropy or "benevolence towards each other" is an old one in the Brahmo Samaj, starting in 1832 when a fund for the Cuttack Flood was inaugurated. The Maharshi and Keshub helped in relief work in 1861 (North India) and 1866 (Orissa). Field work on national initiative was for the first time organised by the 'Charity' section of the Indian Reform Association founded by Keshub in 1870. Philanthropy received a great impetus in the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj and activities began as temporary relief and permanent organisations.

(1) Temporary relief: 1885, famine in Birbhum and Nalhati, covering over 100 villages; 1887 in Tipperah; 1888 in Dacca; 1892 in 24 Parganas and Diamond Harbour; 1893 in Bikrampur; 1894 in Madaripore; 1897, in Jagadishpur, Maheshmunda, Allahabad and Tangail; 1900, in Madhya Pradesh, Bombay and Rajputana. For the first time volunteers from Bengal went to historic Chitore to save the famine-stricken from death; and so on till the present day.

(2) Permanent organisation: in 1877, the National Asylum for Orphans and Destitute Children was started in Agra by Nabinchandra Roy who joined the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. The Deaf and Dumb School of Calcutta was started in May 1893 in the City College (where classes were held) with Principal Umeshchandra Datta as its lifelong Secretary. The South India Sadharan Brahmo Samaj started a Ragged School open to both sexes in 1881 under Buchia Pantulu. In 1891, some devout Brahmos of Calcutta, Pranhari Das, Kshirodchandra Das, Indubhushan Roy and others started the remarkable philanthropic institution, Dasasram (Society of Servants), a combined infirmary, hospital, charitable dispensary and orphanage. Branches were established at Jalalpur, Naldha, Naogaon, Surpanagar. Sibhati, Koramara

and Cherrupoonjee. The most remarkable contribution of the institution was its monthly organ *Dasee* edited by Ramananda Chatterji, the president of Dasasram. This was the first and only journal in India devoted *entirely to social welfare and philanthropy*. Charitable dispensaries were founded by many Brahmo Samajes. There were many more philanthropic institutions of a permanent nature founded. (For detailed history read Jogananda Das: *Banglar Jatiya Itihaser Mool Bhoomika ba Rammohan O Brahmo Andolan*, Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, Calcutta).

An important psycho-sociological factor should be noted here. While these philanthropic activities were briskly going on in the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, Swami Vivekananda (Narendranath Datta) was a young enthusiastic member of the Samaj, being one of its regular choir along with young Dr. Sundarimohan Das, both having a sweet voice. In fact, Vivekananda was a foundation-member of the Samaj since 1878. Thus, naturally and psychologically, he carried many of the ideas and ideals, religious, political and philanthropic, of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj along with him into his later Ramakrishna phase. Vivekananda himself admits that "he never forgot that his longing to consider the problems of his country and his religion on the grand scale found its first fulfilment in his youthful membership of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj" (Nivedita: *The Master as I saw Him*, 5th edition, 1919, pp. 236-37). He adds that *he never repudiated that membership*. It is thus evident that philanthropy or social welfare as a prominent socio-cultural trait of the Ramakrishna Mission was a clear case of cultural transmission from the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj *via* Swami Vivekananda. The popular Saying of Vivekananda—'*jeevay prem koray jei jon shei jon sevichhay Iswar*'—is a free rendering of 'the true way of serving God is to do good to man' (*lokahit koray jei jon shei jon sevichhay Iswar*), the most favourite motto of Rammohan Roy, a study of whom was revived at that period in the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj by Nagendra-

nath Chatterji and others when Vivekananda was an active member.

### *Upliftment of Harijans*

The pioneer *national* organisation for Harijan upliftment in India is the Brahmo Samaj, long before Mahatma Gandhi. In 1893, a Sadhanasram was established by Pundit Sibnath Sastri under the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj for (1) spiritual endeavour and (2) social welfare service. Splendid work was done under this *Seva bibhag* or social service section, apart from relief work.

Vithal Ram Sindhe from Bombay received his training in this Sadhanasram under Sibnath and became a missionary. In 1906, he started the historic Depressed Classes Mission Society of Southern India, for harijan upliftment. It opened free general and industrial schools, boarding houses, charitable dispensaries etc. for the Harijans. Branches were opened: Maharastra Branch in Poona, Madhya Pradesh Branch in Nagpur, Karnatak Branch in Hubli and Tamil Branch in Bangalore.

Some other workers of the Sadhanasram started in Bengal a Depressed Classes Mission in 1908 developing in 1913 into a registered body, the Society for the Improvement of the Backward Classes. Its work spread into villages of Bengal and Assam, establishing a network of 441 schools for the harijans by 1931-32. By 1932, it spread literacy among 45,000 harijans, i.e. at the rate of 1 in every 300. Among the founders were Rajkumar Das and Dr. Prankrishna Acharya. The most devoted worker for a long time was Harinarayan Sen. The Khasi Mission was opened in 1889 by the lifelong bachelor and missionary Nilmony Chakravarti who dedicated himself to the cause. Work was extended among Garos and Rabhas by the missionary Abinashchandra Lahiri. Upliftment work also spread among Methars in Hazaribag, Panchamas in Madras, Ezvas in Aleppi and Hadis in Orissa. Almost all India was already touched by the Brahmo Samaj before Mahatma Gandhi came into the field.

All-India Anti-Untouchability League was organised by Sindhe, also All-India Anti-Untouchability Conferences (1907, Surat, first President, Satyendranath Tagore; 1908, Bankipore, Rao Bahadur Mudhalkar; 1910, Madras, Gopal Krishna Gokhale; 1912, Karachi, Lala Lajpat Rai; 1920, Nagpur, Mahatma Gandhi....). Mahatma Gandhi thus took up the work already started by Sindhe and the Brahmo Samaj and included it in the programme of the Congress. (For detailed history, read Satischandra Chakravarti and Sarojendranath Roy: *Brahmo Samaj, the Depressed Classes and Untouchability*, Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, Calcutta).

### *Navavidhan*

After the schism of 1878, philanthropic and educational activities were continued in the Brahmo Samaj of India, though on a smaller scale, but social reform activities almost stopped. Brahmananda Keshubchandra immersed himself in communion with God, in intimate spiritual endeavours—*Yoga in jnana, bhakti, seva* etc.—in his new retreat, Sadhan Kanan. He formed his missionaries into an 'Apostolic Durbar'.

On 25 January 1880 (12th *Magh*, 1801 *Saka*) Keshub declared his Navavidhan or the New Dispensation in and through which he announced 'Harmony of Religions'. Two of the cardinal principles of Navavidhan are (1) that all religions are true and (2) pilgrimage to the prophets and saints (*Sadhusamagam*), by which a devotee can enter into the spirit of all the prophets and saints of the world. He introduced many new rituals into the New Dispensation.

The most remarkable contribution of Keshub in this period was his appointing some of his disciples to the study of the different scriptures of the world, *viz*, of Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam. As a result of this outstanding achievement of Keshub, Koran was for the first time translated into Bengali from the original Arabic by 'Maulavi' Girishchandra Sen. Girishchandra also translated into Bengali

from Persian lives of Muslim Saints in five volumes entitled *Tapasmala*. *Oriental Christ* by Pratapchandra Majumdar, the next man in Navavidhan after Keshub, and *Gitasamanyaya-bhashya* and *Vedanta-Samasvaya* by Gourgovinda Upadhyay were the other outcomes of Keshub's splendid mission. It was Pratap who, in the nineties of the last century, founded the well-known and popular students' organisation of Calcutta, the University Institute. After the death of Keshub, Pratapchandra Majumdar attended the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 as a delegate of the Brahmo Samaj, and was declared by the official Report of the Parliament to be the most impressive speaker. (Detailed history of Navavidhan can be had from P. K. Sen: *Biography of a new Faith*; Premisundar Basu: *Brahmananda Keshav, Life and Works*; and other publications by the Navavidhan Trust, 95 Keshab Sen Street, Calcutta).

### *Conclusion*

The Brahmo Samaj represented a New Ideology, a New Discipline of life, a New Socio-Culture from religion to politics that emanated in the last century from Bengal and enveloped all India, releasing hidden and unexpected springs of national energy. The rise of the Brahmo Samaj in the nineteenth century synchronised with the rise of Bengal to its zenith. The decline of Bengal in the twentieth century, again, synchronises with the decline of the Brahmo Movement.

## THE WORLD OF WOMEN

*Lila Majumdar*

In a way the title of the present chapter may be considered as misleading, insomuch as women in Bengal have never lived in a separate world of their own and until quite recently their very existence was merely a necessary and indispensable appendage to that of the male population. All their activities were, as a rule, so ordered as to serve the sole purpose of contributing to the creature comforts of men and all their codes of behaviour and morality were conditioned to preserve the pre-eminence and peace of mind of men.

The women had no separate existence and the few outstanding cases among them of statesmanship and scholarliness were all the more conspicuous because they were glorious exceptions to the general rule, and most of the eulogies showered on them laid particular stress on the opinion that they were as good as their fathers' sons, or almost as good!

Women inherit their world only when they prove to be as worthy in womanliness as men are in their manliness and it is only then that the term 'the world of women' begins to assume any real significance. This then is the goal that all women should set before themselves: not merely to encroach into the affairs of men in a spirit of bitter rivalry, but to learn to participate in them as the equal partners and complements of men.

The old system of dependence and devotion, however, had its good effects in that it had bred in the women of Bengal through generation after generation a spirit of fortitude, devotion and loyalty, for which no self-sacrifice had been too great. On the other hand, to counterbalance this, there had grown also a sense of diffidence and inferiority and a colossal ignorance which always are the worst obstacles in the achievement of emancipation for women.

This was the state of affairs when Bipinchandra Pal was born in the year 1858 and it so continued for more than two decades afterwards. Queen Victoria was on the throne of England; India's first attempt to throw off the foreign yoke had been made and had failed; the government of the country had been taken over by the British Crown; the brand-new Victorian ideals of education and behaviour were taking root in the soil of Bengal; a crop of young intellectuals were soon observed to be advancing to the forefront and India was well on the way to becoming a model British dependency.

The very eagerness of this young enthusiasm however proved to be its own undoing. The vigorous Victorian ideals of intellectual freedom, which flourished with a luxuriance far beyond expectation in this country, bore their own fruit. The question of the education of women, which had challenged, exasperated and at the same time occupied the minds of Victorian thinkers, was bound to interest Indian reformers as well.

Foremost among these Indian reformers were a peculiarly heterogeneous group of educationists, among whom were the foreigner Drinkwater Bethune, Pandit Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Raja Rammohan Roy and Maharshi Debendranath Tagore. To these men and a few others, the women of India owe a debt, too great ever to be repaid, because they placed in their hands without fear or distrust a living branch of the tree of Knowledge. It was as yet a delicate sapling, which needed to be tended with care. Hindu society was

still averse to the idea of education for girls; superstitious fear made the parents unwilling to co-operate; child-marriage narrowed the field of work. Still the sapling sent its roots deep into the earth and put forth new leaf-buds.

It was indeed a good beginning, but knowledge cannot languish behind bars. The ladies would have to come out of *pardah*. It must be remembered that in those days the spread of education did not carry the wide significance that it does now-a-days. The lower strata of society, even in the more advanced Western countries, were as yet steeped in ignorance and education was a privilege of the more wealthy and the better-born. At such a time, when one spoke of education for women, one thought only of the high-born ladies who, however, were hardly less ignorant than their own maid-servants. The maid-servants on the other hand had the advantage of not being able to afford a *zenana* life and, by dint of bitter experience and the expedencies of self-protection, generally knew more of the world than their mistresses, as whose personal advisors they often acted in fact. Even as late as 1910, the good Sister Nivedita spoke of high-caste Hindu ladies who, their daily household chores once completed, had nothing else to do except gossip, quarrel and idle away their time.

So much for ordinary women; fortunately there were others more happily placed, whose husbands or fathers were among the young idealists who had dedicated their lives to the building of a modern nation. It was to these bold thinkers that the Renaissance in Bengal owes its life-blood.

It is one thing to plan a reform and quite another to give it a practical shape. It was easy to map out a chart for the enlightenment of the women of Bengal, but when it came to collecting a handful of girl-children to start a school, Drinkwater Bethune and Iswarchandra Vidyasagar had to summon all their wits and resources. Indeed, it has been said that it was not unusual for the great Pandit Iswarchandra



to be seen carrying a girl-child in his arms to where the school carriage waited.

To teach the alphabet is always the least part of education. The whole mental set-up of Hindu society in Bengal had to be altered. It is strange to think that little more than a hundred years ago the burning of widows was complacently tolerated by the leaders of society, that Vidyasagar had to fight bitterly for the remarriage of child widows, that the followers of Rammohan Roy were disinherited by their own fathers and treated as outcasts.

Yet it was Raja Rammohan Roy whose untiring efforts for the reform of the Hindu religion and Hindu society cleared the way for the Renaissance of Bengal and laid the foundation-stone of modern Bengal. It must be remembered that the Raja had not set out deliberately to found a new religion, although the Brahmo Samaj came into being as the result of his endeavours. The group of men, who with their families had gathered around him, did not merely mouth his unitarian theories and rational ideas, but attempted to order their own lives accordingly. They swept away fearlessly the heavy burden of superstition and ignorance that had so long lain immovably upon the minds of the people of Bengal and had acted as a dead wall in the path of progress.

The first ladies of Bengal who dared to step out of the familiar protection of the *purdah* were the wives of young Brahmos, Gurucharan Mahalanobis' wife, Satyendranath Tagore's wife and one other as reported. It is a point to be observed in this connection that such was the condition of Bengali ladies in those days that a proper costume had to be devised for them before they could appear in public and for many years this new way of wearing the *sari* was popularly known as the 'Brahmo fashion'.

When people take lessons in progress at the initiative of a foreign nation, they are always tempted to ape the ways of that nation. This then was the danger which threatened

educated Bengali society in those days. The more advanced, and particularly those who had themselves been abroad, considered the Indian ways of life and thought too antiquated to admit of reform and openly spoke of introducing English ways wholesale. They even encouraged their wives and daughters to wear European dress, study European languages and despise the customs and learning of their own country.

It was a dangerous doctrine and had not the vigorous nationalists of Bengal boldly taken the situation in hand at this juncture, one may visualise the puerile superficiality that would have engulfed Bengali culture. This marked the real awakening of modern Bengal, because without a growing sense of national consciousness as well as pride, there can be no true Renaissance. To be re-born is not the same as the resuscitation of the dead. One had to shed the old conservatism, but retain one's individuality; one had to study the new ways of life and thought, but avoid mere plagiarism. It was a more difficult task than introducing Western ways wholesale and even more difficult when applied to the problems of women. Society had already split itself. The conservatives still clung to the old ways and violently repulsed reform. There now appeared to be two schools of thought among the intellectuals themselves, of which fortunately the better prevailed. A strong and healthy nationalistic spirit manifested itself in society, literature, arts, politics and educational matters and a handful of fortunate women received the full benefit of this.

It is no longer possible to enumerate all those to whom the women of Bengal are so deeply indebted, but among them the followers of Raja Rammohan Roy were foremost, particularly the men of the Tagore family of Jorasanko, Brahma-nanda Keshabchandra Sen, Pandit Sibnath Sastri, the bold Dwarakanath Ganguli, Durgamohan Das and countless others.

As mentioned before, it was the custom among these men not merely to accept and repeat the principles of a belief but to put them into actual practice. That was how the glorious story of the education of the women of Bengal had commenced. Dwarakanath Ganguli sent his wife Kadambini to college. After she had graduated from there, he sent her to the Calcutta Medical College, so that she enjoyed the singular distinction of being not only the first woman graduate of Bengal but also the first woman medical graduate and not only in Bengal but in the whole of India. With her must also be mentioned Chandramukhi Bose who shared her honours.

There were other brilliant ladies. There was Toru Datta—born the same year as Bipinchandra Pal—who staggered the Western world by the brilliance of her French poetry but who unfortunately died at the age of twenty-two. There was Swarnakumari Devi, Rabindranath's elder sister, born in 1855, whose compositions show no mean literary merit. There was Jnanadanandini Devi, Satyendranath Tagore's wife, whose books for children are still a challenge to modern writers of juvenile literature. There were other gifted women, too numerous to be mentioned individually.

The Tagore ladies introduced a cultivated Indian note into the social life of the women of Bengal, as the direct result of which Indian art, music and an artistic way of life in a purely Indian way, slowly began to be popular. This marked the second stage in the Renaissance of Bengal so far as the women are concerned. They learned to form their own tastes in fashions and home-making.

In order to estimate the full extent of the reawakening of a whole nation, one must take into account not only the few brave women who had dared the bitter winds of social criticism, but also their million less fortunate sisters. The Renaissance in Bengal, which had quickened in the closing years of the nineteenth century, hardly touched the daily lives of ordinary middle-class women, except those whose families

had been influenced either by the Brahmo Samaj or the Christian missionaries whose contribution to the tremendous task of breaking down the old wall of tradition and convention and letting in of the light of day it would be ungrateful to forget. There were however two sides to this.

A number of men and women from the premier Hindu families of Bengal had already accepted Christianity as a release from the deadly narrowness of the Hindu social order. There were numerous others, widows, victims of misfortune and the caste system, social outcasts, who were only too ready to follow their example, not out of any deep veneration for Christianity or its founder, but as the sole haven of refuge where they would be given a chance to rebuild their lives. It was natural for these men and women to grow away from their old lives, to despise the old ways and thus slowly become denationalised and learn to hate everything Indian. The next step would be an ignorance of their ancestral culture and learning, as abysmal as that from which they had escaped.

The more liberal Brahmo Samaj—whose ideals had their roots in the Upanishads and among whose members were practical young intellectuals who had studied all that the West had to offer and had separated the grain from the chaff—acted as a compromise between two extreme view-points and thus performed a signal service in the Renaissance of Bengal, particularly in matters concerning the position of women.

The Brahmos and the Christians were both ostracised by the orthodox society. The reforms they introduced were frowned upon as the highway to loose living and immorality so far as women were concerned. It was the firm belief of the orthodox women that the fine educated ladies would at least lose their husbands if not their characters! Undignified slogans and verses were invented and shouted at the closed carriages bearing the forward young women and

misguided misses to school, for paradoxical as it may appear, the carriages were still closed and the educated ladies mostly invisible though more for their own protection than anything else.

Far from leading licentious lives and encouraging their women-folk to do so, these pioneers of emancipation erred on the side of austerity. Indeed, in the early years of the twentieth century, when education for women even in this country was already beginning to lose its novelty and stern Queen Victoria had been accepted as a pattern for feminine excellence, and to tell the truth, England was growing a little tired of being obliged to keep to the straight and narrow path of proper behaviour, even then educated Bengali society cherished a rigid propriety, which was in danger of growing as conventional in its own way as the orthodox Hindus were in theirs. This was the state of affairs at the close of the year 1905, when the movement which had been called the Renaissance of Bengal may be said to have fulfilled its mission in the sense that it had succeeded in directing the national life of Bengal along its proper channels and in setting the pattern for the social life of Bengal, a pattern which ultimately became the model on which the future development of modern Indian life was based.

The fulfilment of this mission cannot however be considered the end of the story. So far as the women of Bengal are concerned, the two World Wars, together with the series of calamities which followed the second, as well as the mass national movement created by Gandhiji, succeeded in accomplishing in a few years, although at a tremendous cost, what would otherwise have taken an epoch to accomplish, namely the emancipation of women, the very object of which those brave pioneers of the Renaissance in Bengal had dreamed so long ago. But in a quite different form; to pass judgment on which it is not our purpose.

## 35

### PEASANT QUESTIONS

*Narahari Kaviraj*

Orthodox historians incline to the belief that popular resistance against British rule is a comparatively recent phenomenon dating back only to the First World War. Proceeding from the oft-repeated thesis that British rule was a blessing for India, giving her peace and material prosperity, these historians seek to prove that the national movement in India was of a short duration and was the work of a few interested intellectuals only.

Recent researches, however, increasingly prove that such claims have hardly any foundation.

As a matter of fact, Bengal has a glorious record of about two centuries' intermittent struggle against foreign domination. As early as 1862, Mir Kasim rose against the British oppressors and a section of the Sepoys belonging to the British army rallied in his favour.<sup>1</sup> This was followed by a long series of anti-British risings which culminated finally in the great national upheaval of 1857.

#### *Peasant Risings*

The most distinctive feature of the struggle in its earlier phases (that is, in the 18th and 19th centuries), consisted in the fact that the peasantry constituted its chief driving force. The 18th and 19th centuries were marked by a series of peasant risings directed against the British oppressors and their native allies, viz. the landlords.

Another distinctive feature of these risings was that these were spontaneous, sporadic and mainly confined to particular local areas. The series of peasant risings above referred to testify to the existence of a deep-seated malady in the agrarian economy as set up by the British conquerors. The British rulers made never-ending experiments in the system of revenue collection to extort as much money as possible from the Indian people.

With that end in view they introduced the *ijaradari* system during the period 1770-1792. During this period the *ijaradars* armed with British might not only raised the rents skyhigh but they realised a host of illegal *abwabs* from the peasantry, the *salami*, *batta*, *dheadar*, *mangun*, *begar furmush*, *parbani*, *bikṛṛha* etc. etc. This was a period of unorganised and crude plunder of Indian resources by the British intruders. The *ijaradari* system was a part of this system of plunder. The famine of 1770 the peasant rising in Rangpur (1783), the rising in Bishnupur (1789), the Chuar insurrection (1795-99), and innumerable affrays in the countryside were the result of this system. The new system was not only oppressive for the peasants, but the new forms of revenue settlement coupled with the 'Sale Law' which the British introduced were highly injurious to the interest of the old landlords. Some of the old landlords failed to pay off the increased revenue and their landed estates were taken over by a new race of rapacious contractors or *ijaradars*. So the old landlords had their grievances too. The consequence was that the peasant risings in this period were utilised by the landlords to suit their own interests.

The most typical rising during the first stage of development was the peasant insurrection in Rangpur (1783). In 1783 Rangpur became the scene of a violent peasant rising,<sup>2</sup> directed against the illegal exactions of Maharaja Debi Singh, an *ijaradar* appointed by the East India Company. Illegal exactions of various kinds, particularly *batta*, *marucha*, *nuzzar*, *salami*, *dereenwillah* etc. drove to exasperation the

peasants who defied the law and rose in open revolt. The peasants of different places combined and chose from among themselves one Dirjinarain as their 'nabob'....The insurgents broke down the local jail and released such people as were confined for arrears of revenue. The rising was ultimately suppressed with a heavy hand.

About the same time the peasants also rose in revolt in the western part of Bengal, particularly in the districts of Bankura and Birbhum. W. W. Hunter testified to the widespread character of these uprisings (1772-1785).<sup>3</sup> Here as elsewhere evils of a heavy revenue assessment coupled with other issues of oppression drove the peasants into open insurrection. The unrest of the peasant masses became so widespread that the insurrection became general. "Rajnagar fell into the hands of the rebels, Birbhum was threatened and Bishnupur passed under their complete possession".<sup>4</sup>

The Chuars (hill tribes) also offered a dogged resistance<sup>5</sup> against the British intruders in Midnapur, Bankura and Manbhum. In 1799 they threatened the very heart of Midnapur. The Chuars were led by Rani Shiromani of Midnapur estates. In Bankura they were led by Durjan Sing, an ex-Zemindar. On both occasions the Chuars were actuated by real grievances, mainly of an agrarian character. Increase in rent, resumption of *Jaigir* lands etc. provided the main cause of the rebellion.

Another notable uprising was the revolt of the Sannyasis and Fakirs. It was a protracted revolt which continued for full two decades (1770-1790). This uprising extended over a large part of Bengal, embracing all the northern districts of Coochbehar, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Mymensing etc. The Sannyasi rising could continue for such a length of time as it received concrete help from the local villagers, particularly the peasants. The object of attack was chiefly the big zemindars and the rich merchants. The Fakirs "thought it strange that the English should object to their easing the richer few



of the ryots of money they had not the heart to spend". Sometimes they "seemed to wake a merit in not molesting those who had little or nothing to lose".<sup>6</sup>

In the period after 1793 the peasant question passed through a process of transformation. From now on the evil effects of the Permanent Settlement worked their way into every peasant home. New revenue collectors were vested with proprietary rights over the land and had all sorts of laws and law-courts by their side.

The cash payment of revenue was also a great source of harassment and this led to the rise of a class of money-lenders who taking advantage of the laws of mortgage dispossessed the peasants of their land.

Moreover, from this time the Indian rural economy was more thoroughly subjected to the yoke of British colonial exploitation. Indian raw materials were being sent to far-off lands and the peasants came to be tied to the fluctuations of a world market for the first time. In such conditions, the oppression of the landlords and money-lenders broke all bounds and all sorts of obnoxious taxes were imposed upon the peasants. The result was a series of risings in Barasat, Faridpur, Dacca, Santhal Parganas etc.

The Fakirs and religious preachers of the Wahhabi and Ferazi sects offered protracted resistance against the British throughout the 19th century. In 1831 a powerful peasant rising took place at Barasat under the leadership of Titu Meah. The cause of this uprising was an illegal tax imposed by the local Zemindars upon the Muslim *ryots*, better known as the tax on beard.<sup>7</sup>

The Ferazis became active in Faridpur during the years 1838-47. The uprising was led by Dudu Meah, a local Zemin-dar. He acquired much influence among the peasants by his simple teaching that all men are equal, and that no man has a right to levy taxes on God's earth.<sup>8</sup>

In 1855, there took place a widespread revolt among the Santhals which covered a large part of some of the present districts of Bengal, Bihar and Santhal Parganas. For some months at least, British rule was swept out of existence in Bhagalpur, Suri and adjoining areas. The revolt took deep roots in the soil and became very powerful because of the active participation of the Santhals *en masse* and the active assistance which the Santhals received from the 'lower classes', particularly the Domes, Chamars, Kumars, Telis, Momins etc. Chiefly an agrarian rising, the revolt was directed against the imposition of rent and exactions of money-lenders. The Santhals resolved "to take possession of their country and set up a Govt. of their own".<sup>9</sup>

At last, in 1857 came the great national uprising which was a culmination of a series of peasant risings and mutinies which preceded the great event. It may be interesting to note in this connection that the peasants took a considerable share in this national revolt in some areas, particularly in Oudh, Fateghur, and Rohilkhund. In Mathura the rising was directed against the British and their local allies, viz. the money-lenders. Burning of the *bunyas'* houses and property and throwing the accounts in the flames, and destruction of revenue records of the Government had been a characteristic feature of the rising in these areas.<sup>10</sup>

In Bengal too, the peasants, particularly such sections which had a militant tradition, viz. the Ferazis, the Chuars and the Santhals, became very restive during the year 1857. In Bhagalpur, Amar Singh received support and succour from a number of disaffected Santhals.<sup>11</sup> In Manbhum, the Santhals were in a spate of great ferment. The Zemindar of Jaipur was attacked by the Santhals but they were beaten back. The Santhals must have been greatly encouraged by the news of the mutiny of the Ramghur battalion which was engaged in Hazaribagh.<sup>12</sup> The Ferazis became very restive in and around Dacca, Bakhargunge and Faridpur. Reports reached the Joint Magistrate of Faridpur that the

Ferazis "uniting with the Hindusthanis would dispossess the E.I.Co. of Zillahs Dacca and Backergunge". As a precautionary measure Dudu Meah, the Ferazi leader, was detained in jail during the period of the Revolt.<sup>13</sup>

Contrary to the expectations of the British rulers, the blood bath that attended the suppression of the uprising of 1857 could not kill the spirit of popular resistance. On the contrary, the period between 1857 and 1880 is again marked by a widespread outbreak of peasant rising in Bengal. The most significant event of this period was the current of indigo risings which swept over Eastern and Western Bengal and a large part of Bihar.

In 1873 an agrarian uprising swept over Pabna which struck terror into the heart of the local Zemindars and their British protectors. The Pabna rising was a militant protest against the evils of the Permanent Settlement. Prior to these uprisings, the Zemindars not only increased the rental to a considerable extent but realised a host of illegal *abwabs*.<sup>14</sup> It may not be out of place here to mention only a few—

- (i) *Iskool Kharcha*—to cover the Zemindar's subscription to the Government School.
- (ii) *Tar Kharcha*—a rate of pay for telegraph expenses for which the Zemindar paid nothing to the Government.
- (iii) *Rasuud Kharcha*—a general levy for supplies to the camp of the magistrate, when he makes a tour through the estates.
- (iv) *Baruni Asnana*—when the Zemindar goes to bathe at the festival at Jajipur.
- (v) *Hath Bara Mahaprasad*—when the Zemindar comes back from Puri and brings sacred food which the *ryot* must take and pay for.

It is needless to say that these peasant risings had great weaknesses. These uprisings were all scattered, spontaneous

and unorganised. As a result, the British rulers succeeded in suppressing them. Notwithstanding such weaknesses, these peasant risings served as the chief force in the given stage of the liberation movement in India. It is these revolts which dealt the heaviest blows in those days against foreign rulers and their native allies within the country.

### *The Peasant Question and the Intelligentsia*

The uninterrupted flow of peasant risings as mentioned above testify to the fact that the problems of the peasantry constituted one of the major questions of the day. It became clear to all that the backwardness of the peasantry retarded the growth of production and was at the root of a crisis which was eating into the vitals of the entire nation.

Under such circumstances it was not possible for the Bengali intelligentsia to ignore the peasant question altogether. Fired as they were by the European ideals of patriotism, nationalism and social equality, the peasant question left a deep impression upon their minds. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that these intellectuals had sprung mainly from certain strata of landlords, Government servants and servants of the merchant offices closely connected with the administration of the East India Company. As such, these intellectuals from the beginning were used to play a dual role. While they were actuated by the best patriotic ideals, they did not possess the boldness to advocate the overthrow of British power in India. Again, while they stood for liberal social reforms and were diligent in their struggle against feudal forms of social oppression, they had not the courage to advocate the abolition of the Permanent Settlement. Nevertheless, their advocacy of moderate administrative and political reforms and their deep concern about the welfare of the peasants are factors which should not be under-estimated.

The first founder of modern thought in India, Raja Ram-mohan Roy, evinced a deep sympathy for the oppressed

peasantry.<sup>15</sup> Although a supporter of the Permanent Settlement, he objectively pointed out the evils which that system spelt for the peasants. He was particularly opposed to the unlimited licence which was granted to the landlords in the matter of increasing the rent of the land. He raised his voice in favour of the rack-rented peasants and called upon the Government to mitigate their distress by the adoption of appropriate measures to reduce the burden of assessment.

Dakshinaranjan Mukherji, a prominent leader of Young Bengal, went further. He denounced the Permanent Settlement<sup>16</sup> and declared that under Hindu and Muslim rule—"the right in the soil was in private individuals, and that it was a great mistake to have converted the Zeminders, who were the Collectors of revenue into proprietors of landed estates, by which act the rights of a vast number have been sacrificed".

Akshoykumar Datta, a prominent Brahmo leader and an exponent of radical thought, wrote a series of articles in the *Tattvabodhini Patrika*<sup>17</sup> on the 'Conditions of the Village Folk' and these articles were devoted to a scathing criticism of the oppressive conduct of the landlords. He pointed out the oppression which the Zemindars, *Ijaradars*, *Dar-ijaradars* and *Pattanidars* practised over their *ryots*. The illegal exactions of the landlords, particularly *batta*, *agamani*, *parbani*, *hisabana*, *mangan* etc. came in for a sharp criticism from his pen.

The writings of Bankimchandra Chatterji, particularly his article *Bangadesher Krishak* and his later volume *Samya*, are well-known. The influence of St. Simon, Fourier, Proudhon and the International worked up in Bankim a sincere concern for the rights of the peasantry. The feudal forms of peasant servitude received strong denunciation from him.

Bankimchandra was not, however, alone in denouncing the feudal oppression of the landlords and in upholding the rights of the peasantry. As a matter of fact, a new trend was developing in the period following the great upheaval of 1857. There can be no doubt that the bloody suppression

of the revolt roused a sincere hatred against the imperialists and infused a passionate desire for freedom. In a word, the revolt of 1857 helped to radicalise the consciousness of the Bengali intellectuals of the day.

The Indigo Rising of 1859 roused a volume of sympathy from the intellectuals. Harischandra Mukherji, the best representative of this section, identified himself with the cause of the peasantry. In his evidence before the Indigo Commission, Haris boldly admitted his connections with the oppressed peasantry.<sup>18</sup>

Gradually the cause of the peasantry and hatred against their oppressors found expression in a new literature. The best specimens of such literature are *Neeldarpan* and *Jamidarpan*. The *Neeldarpan* exposed the oppression of the indigo planters. *Jamidarpan* took up as its theme the feudal forms of oppression as practised by the local Zemindars. It cannot be doubted that *Neeldarpan* was much influenced by the indigo rising of 1859 and the *Jamidarpan* by the peasant unrest that swept over Bengal in the years following it.

Another notable book which needs introduction in this connection is *The Indian Ryot* (1881) of which the author was Abhoycharan Das. It is mainly a compendium of varied materials, all of them touching on the problem of landlordism and its evil effects upon the peasantry. The author gives a long list of obnoxious taxes, *abwabs* etc., from which the peasants suffered and against which they were sometimes compelled to rise. He gives a sympathetic hearing to the case of the rising peasants. To quote his words<sup>19</sup>: "Is it possible for men to hold up their hands....and thus pave the way to starvation, when we see the lower animals form combinations among themselves to withstand the attack of the enemies? Certainly not. Their very conscience—we may say their very human nature—points out to them the combination as the only means.....Our readers may think, that we are hereby encouraging the ryots to resort

to violence. No. We are far from doing that, we are only saying that men in general are very much disposed to take the law into their hands, when they see the Courts of justice virtually shut up against them".

Not only that. What is most unusual about this author is that he makes a plea for the abolition of the Permanent Settlement and even pleads for the recognition of the proprietary rights of the peasants. In support of his case, he brings a host of arguments. He discusses the question of how peasant proprietorship served as the core of the Revolution in France, and how that question emancipated the economy of Russia from the evils of serfdom. He also refers to the solution of the Irish peasant question. Basing himself on these examples, he makes a plea for the extension of the same rights to Indian cultivators. He next poses the question: will not abolition of Permanent Settlement affect the interest of the landlords? He writes in reply<sup>20</sup>: "Let the injury be admitted, and there is at most a case for compensation, none for perpetuating the wrong. . . . And the amount of compensation which may be justly claimed, not by landholders alone, but likewise. . . . by the great body of non-landholders who have been oppressed all these years by disproportionate taxation".

Not merely theoretical support to the rights of the peasantry. Gradually, as the initial forms of the bourgeois national movement developed, these intellectuals felt the necessity of drawing in the peasants. Their efforts point to a new direction of organising the peasantry. One of the earliest efforts in this direction was made by Surendranath Banerji. *Brahmo Public Opinion* writes: "If our educated countrymen want to politically regenerate the country, they must impart elementary knowledge of the current political topics of the day to the masses." The Ryots Unions which were brought into being sought "to ameliorate the intellectual and moral condition of the peasantry". *Brahmo Public Opinion* writes further: "Rent questions will be discussed

by these Unions no doubt, but no undue importance will be attached to them. In cases of oppression by the Zemindar, these Unions will rise to check them by all legal and legitimate means".<sup>21</sup>

They set their hand to organising agitation among the peasants. Mass meetings were held in Poradaha, Krishnaganj, Kusthia and Tarakeswar to discuss the oppression of the landlords.

### *Conclusion*

The concern which the earliest intellectuals showed for welfare of the peasantry, the help which this section offered to the struggling indigo workers and peasants in their struggle against the indigo planters and landlords, the initial peasant movements which the intellectuals launched—all these factors need deep appreciation.

At the same time we should always bear in mind that the handling of the peasant question by our intellectuals betrays some serious limitations. These intellectuals were so circumscribed by their close ties with the imperialists and the native landlords that never for a single moment could they boldly uphold the question of radical agrarian reforms for the alleviation of the distress of the peasantry.

It may not be out of place here to mention some of these limitations. In the earliest period (the period preceding 1857), the intellectuals, though showing some concern for the peasantry, could never identify themselves with the uprisings of the peasantry. In the later period (the period following 1857) while they lent support to the indigo and peasant risings, they did so merely from a constitutional angle. Even in its most mature stage of development, the bourgeois-led national movement in India failed to take up the peasant question in right earnest; Champaran and Bardoli touched only the surface of the peasant question. It never went deep enough. The Indian National Congress did not for a single occasion raise firmly the question of any



radical agrarian reforms like abolition of landlordism without compensation or redistribution of land to the peasantry.

It is only in the thirties of the twentieth century that the peasant movement entered into a new phase corresponding to a new consciousness. The example of the October Revolution in Russia and the solution of the peasant question in that country under workingclass leadership opened a new example before the world. It remains to be seen whether India can profit by such example.

#### NOTE

1. Mill : *History of British India*, Vol. II, pp. 208-9.
2. *Maharaja Devi Sinha*—Nashipur Raj Estate.
3. Hunter : *Annals of Rural Bengal*, Vol. I, p. 71.
4. S. B. Chaudhuri : *Civil Disturbances during the British Rule in India* (1765-1857), p. 66.
5. J. C. Price : *The Chuar Rebellion of 1799*.
6. J. M. Ghosh : *The Sannyasi and Fakir Raiders*, p. 10.
7. *Calcutta Review* : Vol. LI, 1870.
8. S. B. Chaudhuri : *Civil Disturbances*, p. 113.
9. K. K. Datta : *The Santhal Insurrection of 1855-56*.
10. Robertson : *District Duties during the Revolt in N. W. Provinces of India in 1857*, pp. 133-35.
11. S. B. Chaudhuri : *Civil Rebellion in the Indian Mutinies*, p. 160.
12. District Gazetteers—*Manbhum*.
13. Narahari Kaviraj : *Swadhinatar Sangrame Bangla*, p. 92.
14. *Administration Report of Bengal* (1871-72).
15. Evidence before the Select Committee of House of Commons, 1831.
16. Abhoy Charan Das : *The Indian Ryot*, p. 378.
17. *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, 1850.
18. Evidence before Indigo Commission, No. 3878.
19. Abhoy Charan Das : *The Indian Ryot*, Vol. II, pp. 582-83.
20. *Ibid*, p. 640.
21. Provat Chandra Gangopadhyay : *Bharater Rashtriya Itihaser Khasra*, pp. 46-47.

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### LABOUR CONDITIONS

(1850-1914)

*Sanat Kumar Bose*

#### *Historical Background to the Growth of Factory Labour*

With the evolution of a new industrial pattern in India in the second half of the 19th century, there emerged a new class in our society—the industrial working class. It is a new class, but its evolution has been gradual and has a history of its own.

This history may be traced from the beginning of the second decade of the last century. It was from about 1820 that successful attempts were made to export Indian labour to the different British Plantation Colonies (e.g., Mauritius, British Guiana, West Indies etc). Ever since the abolition of slave trade (in 1807) and of slavery itself (in 1833), these colonies had been passing through a severe labour crisis. Ex-slaves refused to work in the sugar plantations in the old way. Being unwilling to come to terms with these Negro labourers on a newer economic plane, planters began to explore the possibility of recruiting labour from afar, who might be exploited in the traditional pattern. Of the few eastern countries where this search was directed, India was found to be the most covetable one.

In course of time, India became the most important field of labour recruitment and almost all the plantation colonies started importing Indian labour for their sugar plantations. The following table will give us an idea about the number of Indian labourers who emigrated to these colonies at a time when organized industries were just securing a firm footing on the Indian soil.

<i>Name of the colony</i>	<i>No. of Indian emigrants (1870)</i>
1. Mauritius .. ..	351,401
2. British Guiana .. ..	79,691
3. Trinidad .. ..	42,519
4. Jamaica .. ..	15,169
5. Other West Indian Islands ..	7,021
6. Natal .. ..	6,448
7. French Colonies .. ..	31,346
Total ..	533,595

It is to be noted that these Indian labourers were not emigrating voluntarily, neither were they 'free labour'. They were recruited forcibly and made to sign a contract (Indenture) expressing their willingness to work in the colonies for a specific period (usually five years), and for a specific wage rate. It was from this mode of contract that a new type of labour came into existence in India. These indentured labourers were the first important category of wage-earning labourers in our country.

The horrors associated with forcible recruitment in the early period cannot be adequately described. A special type of recruiting agents (*Arkatis*) was appointed (from among the scums of society) by leading European Labour Recruiting Agency Houses. These *Arkatis* spread themselves out throughout the entire country. Whenever a suitable opportunity occurred—and such opportunities occurred quite frequently—they would resort to all sorts of fraudulent practices

to tempt or force unfortunate men and women in the countryside to sign the contract. Having secured the signed contract, it did not need much effort to bring down the victims to Calcutta where they would be kept in closely guarded depots, pending their departure to the colonies. The sea voyage itself was no better. On board the vessel, they were treated like beasts of burden. No regulations were usually followed by the officers of these ships with the result that there were fatal casualties in every boat carrying the labourers. The following evidences before the Enquiry Committee of 1838 (set up by the Government "to ascertain the nature and extent of the abuses which have prevailed and to advise the Government as to the best means of preventing their recurrence") will throw some light on the existing state of affairs relating to the indentured labour:

*Evidence of Capt. James Rapson (skipper of the ship Sophia):*

Q. In your opinion, was not the *Sophia* too much crowded?

A. In my opinion, as a general rule, it was too many to take. I think 300 would have been quite enough . . . . (actually, it took 366 emigrants with the result that 2 persons were lost overboard, and 8 by death on board the ship).

*Evidence of Capt. A. G. Mackenzie (skipper of another vessel):*

Q. How many meals had they (i.e., the emigrants) each day?

A. They ate but once a day.

Q. Can you speak from personal knowledge of the treatment of the coolies in the Mauritius?

A. I have heard they are harshly treated there . . . do not get their full pay. One man complained to me

that he had been there 18 months and never got a farthing of his pay....

Other evidence cited below would show the nature of fraudulent practices of which these labourers were victims.

*Evidence of Boodoo Khan (a coolie):*

- Q. What wages did Beerbul (the recruiting agent) tell you, you should get?
- A. He told me that I was to get 14 rupees per month; 7 rupees to be deducted for my diet and 7 to be paid in cash.
- Q. What advances did you receive?
- A. 6 months' pay was issued, of which one month was deducted as dustoree (commission), 5 rupees for some brass plates, 10 rupees for clothes, 7 rupees I gave to Jawahar to buy some necessities for me, which I never got, and I do not know what other deductions they made, but I received 28 rupees in my hand in cash, but they afterwards took this 28 rupees of it, and told me that some food and other articles should be purchased and sent to me on board in a box with an account—but they never sent any.
- Q. Did they (i.e., other coolies) tell you how much money each of them had?
- A. Some had two and some had three rupees.
- Q. Did the coolies know where they were going, and how long they would be absent?
- A. Nobody knew. All heard they were to arrive in 5 days.

According to the terms of contract (which as such were quite severe), a labourer was entitled to a monthly cash wage

of 7 rupees, and an advance, equivalent to six months' wages (i.e., 42 rupees), was to be paid to him prior to his leaving the country. In practice however, as we have found from the previous evidence (and such evidences may be quoted in hundreds), he hardly received any cash advances at all; most of it was taken away from him on some account or other, by persons connected with the 'Coolie Trade'. In fact the terms of contract were usually not mentioned to him. On the contrary, he was very often misinformed about the nature of work he was due to undertake, the period of contract and the whereabouts of his destination.

Malpractices continued to grow with every increase in the demand for labour. There had not emerged a full-fledged labour market in India. But poverty was spreading rapidly. Economic conditions in the countryside were deteriorating steadily. Objective conditions for emergence of wage-labour were maturing, but in an oblique way. For these reasons, though the poorer sections of the people were not yet willing to come to the labour market with a view to selling their labour power voluntarily, neither could they find alternative sources of gainful employment in the rural sector. This resulted in the formation of a 'floating population' all over the country and it was this section of our population that became an easy prey to the *Arqatis*' deceptive offers.

Upto 1837, there was no legal check on labour emigration. Disputes connected with the indentured system were to be solved by the different contracting parties themselves and the Government kept itself completely aloof. But by 1837, things came to such a pass that some form of check had to be established on what was going on in the name of labour emigration. Acting therefore on the recommendations put forward by the Law Commission of 1837, the Government of India passed the first Emigration Act (Act V of 1837). This act, for the first time in British Indian legal history, sanctioned and legalised the practice of employing inden-

tured labour. It thus ushered in the indenture system, a system that was to be subsequently utilised for procuring labour for one of the most profitable Indian industries, viz., the tea industry of Assam. By the middle of the century, when the factory system was just being laid down, this form of labour recruitment had become an established practice and was getting even a new impetus due to the expanding tea gardens of Assam. Even certain departments of the Government (e.g., Public Works Department) depended mainly on this type of labour for their work.

It may be said that the factory labour in India in the subsequent period evolved from the same socio-economic background which gave birth to the indentured labour in the previous period. In fact, the two types of labour existed simultaneously for a long time (the latter continued upto 1917) and shared many characteristic features together. An analysis of this background, therefore, enables us to understand certain specific features of Indian industrial labour.

It is well known that the transitional period between the decay of feudalism and the consolidation of capitalism in countries like England was a veritable hell for the working people. From the point of view of unemployment, exploitation, oppression and poverty, some form of similarity may be established in the mode of living between the English working people of this period and their Indian counterpart in the period under our consideration.

But this is only one aspect of the problem. While capitalism in the former case was also creating a basis for their subsequent absorption in the newly developed industries at home or in the recently acquired colonies, in the latter case no such alternative source of livelihood was easily forthcoming.

The destruction of feudalism in Bengal was not only not completed, it was rather given a new lease of life through the new land tenure systems propounded and implemented

by the East India Company's Government. This coupled with the absence of genuine industrialisation failed to uproot the Bengali peasants. But land alone could hardly be expected to feed the entire population and it is therefore no wonder that we should find evidence of a huge mass of floating population (increasing almost every year), throughout the entire 19th century. This sector of our population was not permanently absorbed anywhere and it was precisely from this sector that industrial labour in our country emerged. For them, the wage-form was not the exclusive (or permanent) source of living. Neither were the wage-rates prevailing at this time sufficiently tempting. Hence people did not voluntarily take to wage-labour. They were forced to do so, and the force applied had the necessary legislative sanction. It was through these successive legal enactments that an indentured form of labour came into existence, and it was in this form that modern wage-labour in India was born.

*Labour's formative period (1870-1914)*

The base of modern industrial structure in India was laid down in the period 1850-1870. It is found that "something like one hundred and fifty million pounds of British Capital were invested in India...between 1854 and 1869. Capital continued to move to India at the rate of about five million pounds a year during the seventies....About seventy-five million pounds went into railways by 1870.... An estimated amount of twenty millions had been ventured upon private account in tea plantations, jute mills, banks...." (Jenks, *Migration of British Capital*, p. 225).

The principal industries that grew up in Bengal (including Assam) were jute, tea, mining and cotton textiles.

Except for a brief spell at an early period, when only a few jute mills were working, local labour, drawn from the neighbouring villages around the industrial belt of Calcutta, were never found to be sufficient. The labour problem was



all the more acute in the tea and mining industries which had to depend mainly on immigrant labour. Early legislations relating to labour were therefore concerned with recruiting and compelling labourers to work. Two important legislative measures deserve our notice in this connection, viz., the Workmen's Breach of Contract Act (Act XIII of 1859) and certain sections (notably sec. 492) of the Indian Penal Code.

The former act was passed at the instance of the Calcutta Trades Association and others interested in handling labour. It had a very wide scope and empowered the employer to punish his workmen in case of breach of contract. Tea planters of Assam especially took the fullest advantage of this act and workers were punished at the slightest instance of disobedience. In a report to the Government of Bengal, Lt. Col. H. Hopkinson, Commissioner of Assam, wrote (on 9 April 1866): "I was far from supposing that anywhere in the province coolies could be treated with the cold-blooded revolting cruelty which the papers herewith forwarded disclose:

*Extract from Capt. Lamb's Diary:*

Moved to the Gabroo and inspected the Assam Tea Company's gardens *en route*; found seven men in one of them, who had the marks of having been unmercifully beaten with a cane on their backs. They stated that short ration had induced them to abscond, and about a fortnight ago, they had been brought back to the garden, and the assistant in charge of it had tied them up and given each of them a severe beating. One man's wounds were deep into the flesh and still quite raw.... From further enquiries, I gather that after these unfortunate men had their backs cut to pieces with a cane, oil and salt had been rubbed into their wounds". (Quoted by Sanat Kumar Bose, *Capital and Labour in the Indian Tea Industry*).

Physical torture alone, however, cannot create a class. In spite of such acts, therefore, supply of labour failed to keep pace with the demand.

Ever since the early stage, and right up to the First World War, industries as a whole were facing labour shortage. The crisis became rather serious towards the end of the century. The different industrial organisations were getting impatient over labour shortage. It was hampering further growth of industries in Bengal. In 1906, Mr. Foley was asked by the Government of Bengal to enquire into the causes of labour shortage and suggest how it could be overcome. The report which he submitted is very interesting. First of all he held the view that there was no genuine labour shortage. Labour could be had in any number if the employers adopted a systematic method of recruitment. Neither was it a fact that people were unwilling to search for employment beyond their native villages. If therefore employers were faced with an immediate labour shortage, it was due to the fact that the superficial sources of labour (which were supposed to be the only sources by the employers) were unable to meet the actual demand due to a rapid growth of industries. The following tables show how fast the industries, and with them the demand for labour, was growing:

(1) *Jute Industry*

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of Looms</i>	<i>No. of Workers</i>
1879-80	4,946	27,494
1895-96	10,169	78,114
1902-03	17,189	118,904
1904-05	19,991	133,164
1906	23,534	154,962 approx.

(2) *Coal Mines*

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of Workers</i>
1894	30,773
1903	74,538
1904	75,749

(3) *Tea gardens (in Assam)*

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of Workers</i>
1890	406,089
1900	664,897

If therefore the supply of labour failed to keep pace with the growing demand (in spite of great potential sources of labour), it was mainly because the would-be labourers did not consider the terms offered by the industries to be sufficiently tempting. They were searching for other sources of livelihood. The above statement can be factually substantiated. The following districts in the Bengal Province were considered to be 'congested' districts in 1901 (and were therefore expected to supply labour): Saran, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Northern Sahabad, Patna, Northern Monghyr, and parts of Balasore and Cuttack. Total emigration from Saran (which used to send the maximum number of emigrants to the other parts every year) to the different districts of Bengal in 1901 was 138,902. Of these about 35,000 emigrated to Eastern Bengal (i.e., took to agricultural work) and 47,000 to the industrial belts of Calcutta. Similarly, of the total emigrants from Muzaffarpur (numbering 67,325) only about 20,000 migrated to the industrial belts of Calcutta. This indicates that there was a movement of population but this movement was not always directed towards the industrial districts. What was this due to? It was as has been pointed out earlier due to the fact that, apart from bad living conditions, the industries had nothing decisively better to offer. As the Royal Commission on Labour reported, "when the industries of the Hooghly were being built up, their economic position was not such as to make the terms offered by the Industry attractive". In fact, there was practically no rise in wages during the period 1860-1890. Detailed analysis shows that though there was some rise in wages in the period 1830-1860, wage-rates remained "remarkably stable" between 1873-1891. Wages of jute mill workers in Bengal

in 1892 were the same as in 1860. Even in the subsequent period (1890-1912), factory wages were not rising as rapidly as agricultural wages, and the actual rise (in the former case) could just keep pace with the rise in prices of food-grains.

### *Labour Legislation*

We have already stated that earliest labour legislations in India were framed with a view to facilitating labour recruitment and forcing labour to work. There were no clauses in these acts to safeguard labour's interests. Neither was there any organisation in the country to fight for the workers whose plight in such a background can easily be understood. The most disturbing feature in the industrial labourer's life was bad living and working conditions, the average hours being 16 to 18 a day. Besides, there were no restrictions on the employment of child and women labourers. It was reported in the British Parliament (in 1875) that women and children were "systematically worked for 16 hours a day and in many cases even including Sundays". The first legislation designed to put some check on the unrestrained exploitation of labourers was the Factories Act passed in 1881. Strangely enough, it was the outcome of a protracted fight waged by the Manchester Chamber against the rising Indian cotton textile industry of Bombay. On 30 July 1875, the Earl of Shaftesbury made the following speech in the House of Lords:

We must bear in mind that India has the raw material and cheap labour; and if we allow the manufacturers there to work their operatives 16 or 17 hours and put them under no restrictions, we are giving them very unfair advantage over the manufacturers of our country and we might be undersold even in Manchester itself, by manufactured goods imported from the East.

Between 1881 and 1911 some labour associations grew up in Bombay and Bengal. These were by no means 'trade

unions', but rather welfare associations, formed and led by some philanthropists (like S.S. Bengalee, Lopkanday). Their aim was to regulate the working conditions of labourers.

The first Factories Act failed to check those abuses for which it was specifically framed. Women and child labour found no shelter behind it. As Punekar remarks, "The Act (i.e., 1st Factories Act) proved to be 'gravely and palpably inadequate' and the dissatisfaction with the provisions for the protection of children and, in particular, the absence of any regulation of women's labour, gave rise to an agitation for the amendment of the Act as soon as it was passed".

As late as 1908, we find children, 6 or 7 years old, being forced to work for 7 or 8 hours a day, though the first Factories Act had fixed 9 years as the lower age for working children. The Factory Labour Commission of 1908 found frequent infractions of the Factories Act: "the proportion of under age children employed as half-timers probably amounts to 30 or 40 per cent of the total half-timers". (Buchanan, *The Development of Capitalist Enterprises in India*, p. 308). The plight of child labour can be realised from the following description given by the above Commission with respect to the working practices of a jute mill in Bengal:

The operatives are mostly Bengalis living in surrounding villages upto 3 or 4 miles off. The first warning mill whistle is blown at 3 A.M. Enquiry shows that an half-timer, a child of not more than 7 years, selected by the commission at random, had to leave his home every morning at 4 A.M. and walk 2 miles to the mill. (*Ibid*, p. 308).

While the Manchester Chamber of Commerce was carrying on agitation for establishing Factories Acts in India with a view to curbing the growth of the Indian textile industry of Bombay, the European tea planters of

Bengal were getting busy in forming the Tea Planters' Association (1881) with a view to solving the problem of labour shortage in their tea gardens of Assam. It was mainly due to their efforts that the Inland Immigration Act of 1882 was passed. At the first annual meeting of the Tea Planters' Association (1882), the Chairman said: "I think we may say that the representation made to the government with reference to the new Coolie Act (i.e., Inland Immigration Act of 1882) assisted materially in getting it passed in a form nearer to that recommended by the Commissioners appointed to consider and amend the old act than would probably otherwise have been the case.... We all benefit by being united in such an Association". (The *Hindu Patriot*, February 1882).

This Act (one of the worst in the entire history of Indian Labour legislations) permitted free and uncontrolled recruitment of labour for the tea gardens and thus "led to some of the grossest scandals of which the most important was heavy mortality among the recruits on their way to labour districts". (R. K. Das, *Plantation Labour in India*).

Public opinion in Bengal was naturally opposed to passing such an act. Daily and weekly newspapers in Calcutta launched a regular campaign exposing the real nature of this act which was characterised as the 'Slave Law'. The leading role in this protest movement was taken up by the *Hindu Patriot*, followed by other papers like *Sanjibani* and later on by the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. Indian members opposed the Bill tooth and nail in the Viceregal Council, and when in spite of all opposition the bill was passed, the *Hindu Patriot* wrote (on 5 January 1882): "It should be borne in mind that the agitation against the Inland Emigration Bill has proceeded from the native community alone.... Throughout this struggle we were quite aware that we were carrying on an unequal contest. On the one hand there were arrayed the whole European Community, both official and non-official, having more or less direct interest

in tea, and on the other were poor coolies who were speechless".

Upto the beginning of the First World War, there was hardly any labour organisation in the country to voice the cause of labour. Though a few strikes did occur in Bengal during this period (there were two strikes in Budge Budge Jute Mill in 1895 and 1896), collective bargaining in the modern sense of the term was unthinkable. Neither was 'wage-increase' the most important issue before the labourers.

The different forms of social disabilities with which labourers were burdened were considered to be so much important that, to fight against these, there grew up a number of labour welfare organisations. These organisations were formed and led by a section of the middle-class intelligentsia. The most important issue before these organisers during the first two decades of the present century was the abolition of the Indenture System.

On 4 March 1912, Gokhale brought a resolution in the Legislative Council with a view to abolishing it. In a spirited speech, he declared: "The Government, it is clear, are not going to accept this Resolution; that being so, the Resolution is bound to be thrown out. But, Sir, that will not be the end of the matter. This motion, the Council may rest assured, will be brought forward again and again, till we carry it to a successful issue".

The final blow (which needed 4 more years of constant agitation) to this form of contract labour was given by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, when he moved the following resolution (on 20 March 1916) in the Council: "That this Council recommend to the Governor-General in Council that early steps be taken for the abolition of the system of Indian Indentured Labour". In the face of a firm stand by the opposition, the Government of India had to bow down and Malaviyaji's Resolution was passed. Thus ended the formative chapter in the history of Indian Labour.

## ECONOMIC ENTERPRISE

(1833-1914)

*Sunil Kumar Sen*

Throughout the Mughal period merchant capital was advancing in Bengal. Ralph Fitch and Francis Bernier have vividly described the prosperity of Bengal, its expanding trade and its fine fabrics. Merchant capital maintained its ground even during the early years of the Company's rule. As *banians* Bengali merchants played an important role in British private trade transactions. The *bania* was "interpreter, head book-keeper, head Secretary, head broker, the supplier of cash and cash-keeper". The proceedings of the Revenue Board testify to the opulence of the Bengali *banians*, some of whom were fabulously rich. Radhakishore Roy, a *banian*, advanced a sum of Rs.50,000 to John Grose of Rangpur in 1772. Gokul Ghosal, Baranasi Ghose, 'Hidaram' Banerjee, Akrur Dutt, Monhur Mukherjee, 'Nobkissen' (Maharaj Nabakrishna), Gangagobind Sing, Krishnakanta Nandi were some of the millionaire *banians* of Bengal in the second half of the eighteenth century. Gokul Ghosal, Akrur Dutt, Baranasi Ghosh of Sutanati were also 'prominent inland traders'.<sup>1</sup>

The Charter of 1793 marked the beginnings of the decline of merchant capital in Bengal. The Permanent Settlement created private property in land and "the whole



system of Judicial administration, promulgated in 1793, was geared to the protection of that property".<sup>2</sup> In a revealing passage Cornwallis wrote: ".....there is every ground to expect that the large capitals possessed by many of the Natives.....will be applied to the purchase of landed property as soon as the tenure is declared to be secure". These hopes of Cornwallis were fulfilled. 'Natives' began to invest their capital in land. The period coincides with the gradual ascendancy of the famous agency houses which began to monopolise Bengal's trade and industry. These agency houses "controlled the country trade, financed indigo and sugar manufacture, cornered the Government contracts, ran the three banks and the four insurance companies at Calcutta".<sup>3</sup>

After the passing of the Charter Act of 1833, the agency houses collapsed and on their ruins arose a new type of organisation—the managing agency system which has become famous for its wide range of activity.<sup>4</sup> Bengali merchants could no longer hold their ground and were driven away from the export-import trade.<sup>5</sup> The withering touch of the Company's tariff policy, 'the one-way free-trade', the importation of machine-made goods led to the ruin of the handicrafts. The traditional economy of the country was shattered in its foundations, and there arose the desperate over-pressure on agriculture which became more and more a losing battle.

### *Early Ventures*

The second half of the eighteenth century was, indeed, a bleak age in Bengal, and it is not fortuitous that the advancing merchant capital did not evolve into industrial capital and that the early ventures of the Bengalis generally ended in failures.

The East India Register and Directory mentions the names of several Bengali ship-owners—Pancho Dutt, Ramgopal Mullick and Muddan Dutt. But the most famous

Bengali merchant and ship-owner was Ramdulal Dey or Ram Dullol. He began his career as a *sircar* of the Fairlies and built up a fortune of half a million at the lowest estimate. The American traders borrowed from him. When most of the American business began to pass to the European houses like the Palmers and the Alexanders, this millionaire *bania* was ruined. In 1813 Ramdulal had only one ship in the port of Calcutta—"the last tragic gesture of the Bengalee ship-owner before complete annihilation".<sup>6</sup>

In this period the most remarkable Bengali who had an industrial vision was Dwarkanath Tagore, grandfather of Rabindranath Tagore. As a Zemindar and Head Dewan of the Company's Salt and Opium Department, he built up a fortune and invested his money in industrial undertakings. He established indigo factories, introduced the system of sugar cultivation, and on the advice of Bentinck founded a house of business, Carr, Tagore and Co., which had connections with many European countries. Dwarkanath hailed it with the remark that "it is the first instance in which an open and avowed partnership has been established between the European and the Bengal merchant".<sup>7</sup> In 1837 the firm of Carr, Tagore and Co. purchased the Chinakuri mine from Messrs. Alexander and Co. and in 1843 the concerns of Carr, Tagore and Co. and those of Gilmore, Homfray and Co. were amalgamated into the famous Bengal Coal Company.<sup>8</sup> Dwarkanath was also a Director of the Calcutta Steam Tug Association which purchased a ship, the *Forbes*, in 1836. The profits of the Tug Association rose to Rs. 3,000 a month and the local press gave it a nickname: 'the Thug'!<sup>9</sup> Some of his industrial undertakings failed, and his feelings were revealed when he castigated the British for having "taken all which the natives possessed, their lives, liberty and property, and all were held at the mercy of Government".<sup>10</sup>

Bengalis also participated in banking and it will be seen that banking has always been a favourite field of activity

of the Bengalis, particularly of the landed aristocracy. Dwarkanath was a Director of the Union Bank.<sup>11</sup> The Commercial Bank was established in 1819, the principal share-holders being Mackintosh & Co. and Suryakumar Tagore. The principal share-holders of the Calcutta Bank (1824) were Messrs. Palmer and Co. and Raghuram Goswami.<sup>12</sup> Among the projectors of the Dacca Bank (1846) most prominent were Khajah Alimullah, Khajah Abdul Gani and Nundlal Dutt.<sup>13</sup>

It may be mentioned that the Roys of Bhagyakul, the richest family in Bengal in this period, did not participate in industrial undertakings. They showed their talents in money-lending or *mahajani*.<sup>14</sup> It was only in the last quarter of the nineteenth century that they began to invest money in inland shipping and banking.

### *The Waking Bourgeoisie*

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the beginnings of an important shift in the economic situation which was evident in the emergence of the Indian bourgeoisie. In 1854 Cowasji Nanabhoy Davor founded the first cotton mill with Indian capital in Bombay and by 1879-80 the number of cotton mills rose to 58. In 1885 the Indian National Congress was formed. In 1896 the first Industrial Exhibition was held as an adjunct to the Congress session which in the words of Surendranath heralded "the industrial upheaval that was soon to find expression in the Swadeshi movement". These events had their echo in Bengal and the Bengali bourgeoisie began to wake up.

The first Bengali who built an iron and engineering works in Bengal is Kishorilal Mukherji of Howrah. He founded in 1867 the firm K. L. Mukherji and Co. which started an iron works at Shibpur, called Shibpur Iron Works. It was later removed to Salkhia. The firm of the Mukherjis manufactured small and heavy castings, railings, hand pumps, brackets and small machine-parts.<sup>15</sup> In 1892 Acharya Prafullachandra

Roy started the Bengal Chemical and Pharmaceutical Works at 91 Upper Circular Road. It manufactured drugs from indigenous materials—drugs which have since become famous. It also manufactured laboratory apparatus for schools and colleges. The perfumes and fruit syrups of the Bengal Chemical sold very well, and the firm began to expand; Rajsekhar Bose worked as its Manager.<sup>16</sup> In 1897 Raja Sreenath Roy, Raja Janakinath Roy and Rai Sitanath Roy Bahadur founded the East Bengal River Steam Service Ltd. of which Raja Sreenath Roy and Brothers were the managing agents. The firm had several steamers which plied between East Bengal districts and Calcutta carrying mainly jute and rice.<sup>17</sup> There were also some small firms which dealt in hair-oil and medicines, such as C. K. Sen and Co. whose speciality was *Jabakusum*; Buttokristo Paul and Co. which made *Edward's Tonic*; Darjipara Chemical Works of P. M. Bagchi which prepared ink and scented oil; K. B. Sen and Co. which dealt in country-made goods and manufactured wood, ivory and shell articles, pottery, soap, ink, pencil etc.<sup>18</sup>

The activities of the Dawn Society (1902-1907) and its Industrial Section have some bearing on the movement for industrialization in Bengal. The Industrial Section aimed at "directing the attention of our youngmen to the problem of India's industries and making them think of the industrial position of our country, and also of its future prospects and possibilities".<sup>19</sup> The Industrial Section which was opened in June 1903 was placed under the supervision of J. Chaudhuri, Managing Director of the Indian Stores, and K. B. Sen, a well-known cloth merchant. They set up a Swadeshi Store which displayed Swadeshi goods, such as *dhutis* and *saris*, soaps, trunks, cutlery (single-blade knife, double-blade knife, scissors), towels etc.<sup>20</sup> The Swadeshi Stores sold about Rs.10,000 worth of country-made goods between 1903 and 1904.<sup>21</sup> The Industrial Section of the Dawn Society directed its activity, as the Hindu Mela did years ago, to the resuscitation of the handicrafts which were in a moribund state.

It should be noted that Bengalis had not as yet built up any heavy industry or large-scale machine industry and the pace of industrial development was slow and industrial progress quite insignificant. Foreign capital held the field, and the *Bengalee* which was being edited by Surendranath expressed the anger and anguish of the Bengalis in its editorial on 18 February 1903:

What is the net gain to the country from the draining of the Kolar gold-fields? The wages of clerical and coolie labour and the royalty and rent paid to the Mysore Government.....What is true of the Kolar Gold-field is true of the entire mining industry of the country, so far as it is worked by foreign capital and is controlled by foreign agency.....We can not indeed hope for protection, but we have a right to expect an equitable treatment of our industries. But instead of such treatment we have an excise duty imposed upon our cotton goods.

The rumblings of discontent of the waking bourgeoisie became louder and louder till we reach the tumultuous period of the Swadeshi movement.

### *The Swadeshi*

In 1905 came the Swadeshi movement which swept like a tidal wave over the country. The movement raised the slogan: 'Buy Swadeshi'. In this national democratic movement, the Bengalis sought the fulfilment of their economic aspirations.

On the morrow of the Bengal Partition, the call for 'the National Fund' was given, in a mammoth public meeting at Calcutta, for the economic regeneration of the country. The trustees of the Fund included Maharaja Suryakanta Acharya Chaudhuri, Maharaja Manindrachandra Nandi, Raja Pearymohan Mukherji, Kumar Satishchandra Singh and Surendranath.<sup>22</sup> By 1906 they collected 1 lakh. They set up weaving schools at Calcutta and Kishoreganj.<sup>23</sup>

Bengalis turned to large-scale machine industry and the Banga Lakshmi Cotton Mill was started in 1906 with a capital of Rs. 12,00,000. It purchased the Luxmi Tulsi Cotton Mills of Serampore at Rs. 7,15,000. The Directors included the leading Zemindars and merchants of Bengal: Maharaja Suryakanta Acharya, Maharaja Manindrachandra Nandi, Raja Sitanath Roy, R. N. Mukherji, Krishnachandra Dey of Messrs. K. M. Dey and Co. and Upendranath Sen.<sup>24</sup> The mill produced not only yarn, but also *dhuties* and *saris*. It had 23,000 spindles and the hands employed were 1026. The mill had had four sets of proprietors within ten years of its formation.<sup>25</sup> Encouraged by the success of the Banga Lakshmi and the patriotism of the people who preferred coarse Swadeshi cloth to fine foreign cloth, Mohinimohan Chakrabarti, a retired Deputy Magistrate, started in 1908 the Mohini Mills at Kushthia (Nadia District) with an authorised capital of Rs. 1,50,000. This mill also took up the production of *dhuties* and *saris*.<sup>26</sup> In an expanding market created by the demand for Swadeshi goods the two mills began to stabilise their position.

Bengalis did not follow up the rapid success of the Banga Lakshmi and Mohini mills. Capital was not forthcoming in the starting of more cotton mills or sugar mills or iron foundries. Seized with the get-rich-quick mania, Bengali landlords and merchants turned to banking. In 1908 shares were floated to organise the Bengal National Bank with an authorised capital of Rs. 50,00,000. The Maharaja of Darbhanga, Maharaja Suryakanta Acharya, Raja Sreenath Roy, Raja Pearymohan Mukherji, Janakinath Roy (banker and Zemindar), Upendranath Sawoo (merchant), Sreenath Roy (Zemindar) were on the board of directors; E. F. Gros was appointed as its Manager.<sup>27</sup> Another group of landlords and merchants sponsored the Co-operative Hindusthan Bank, the first co-operative bank in India, with an authorised capital of Rs. 2 *crores*. Originally it was called the Hindusthan Bank, shareholders later changed its name. The patrons and directors included the Maharaja of Coochbehar,

the Maharaja of Cossimbazar, the Maharaja of Natore, A. Chaudhuri (Bar-at-law) and Aswini Datta, hero of the Swadeshi movement in Barisal.<sup>28</sup> These banks later sank into oblivion.

Bengali landlords and merchants also financed inland shipping. In 1908 a new company, the Co-operative Navigation Ltd. , was floated with an authorised capital of Rs. 25,00,000 in order to "facilitate cheap transport of goods and merchandise" from East Bengal to Calcutta. The patrons and directors of the Company included the richest landlords of Bengal—Maharaja Suryakanta Acharya, Maharaja Manindrachandra Nandi, Brojendrakishore Chaudhuri of Mymensing, Kumar Bejoysankar Roy of Teota and Surendranath Tagore of the Tagore family. Aswini Datta and A. Rasul, leaders of the Swadeshi movement, J. Chaudhuri (Bar-at-law) and Pramathanath Paramanik, proprietor of Caledonian Docks, Howrah, were also on the board of directors.<sup>29</sup> The Roys of Bhagyakul (Nandalal Roy, Jasodlal Roy and Taritbhushan Roy) merged their old company, the Bikrampur Flotilla Service, with a bigger company which was floated under the name of the Eastern Bengal Mahajan Flotilla Company Ltd. with an authorised capital of Rs. 15,00,000. The East Bengal Merchants' Association identified themselves with this company.<sup>30</sup> As the demand for jute, 'the golden crop' of East Bengal, increased to meet the growing needs of the jute mills on the banks of the Hooghli, the prospects of inland shipping brightened, and the steamer service of the Roys of Bhagyakul yielded good profits.

Life Insurance also attracted their attention. Two companies were floated, the India Equitable Life Insurance Co. Ltd. (capital—Rs. 10,10,000) and the Hindusthan Co-operative Insurance (capital—Rs. 1,00,00,000). Raja Pearymohan Mukherji, Jatindranath Roy Chaudhuri (Zemindar of Taki), Prosaddas Baral (stock and share broker), A. Rasul were on the board of directors of the first company; Surendranath

Tagore and Brojendrakishore Chaudhuri were the Secretary and Treasurer respectively of the Hindusthan.<sup>31</sup>

Muslim enterprise led to the starting of the Bengal Hosiery Co. with a capital of Rs. 2,00,000. It proposed to set up a hosiery factory at Calcutta in order to begin mass production of hosiery goods so that the foreign monopoly of the trade may be curbed. Some of the big Muslim landlords and merchants were on the board of directors: Nawab Syed Abdus Sobhan of Bogra, A. H. Ghuznavi (Zemindar and merchant), Ahmed Musaji Salaji of Messrs. Musaji Ahmed and Co. Bhupendranath Bose and Radhacharan Pal were also associated with this hosiery company.<sup>32</sup>

As the Swadeshi movement gathered momentum and 'Buy Swadeshi' gripped people's minds, Bengali economic enterprise, which reached its peak in 1908-9, began to spread to many fields—tannery, pottery, cigarette factories, flour mills, etc. The Agra Stewart Factory and the Utkal Tannery Works were merged into a new company, the Boot and Equipment Factory Co. Ltd., which was floated in 1908 with a capital of Rs. 5,00,000. Its object was to manufacture leather boots, shoes, bags, portmanteaus etc. Raja Pearymohan Mukherji, Kaviraj Debendranath Sen, Dr. Nilratan Sarkar, Ahmed Musaji, Rai Saheb Kedarnath were on the board of directors of the company.<sup>33</sup> The Calcutta Pottery Works was established in 1909. The firm manufactured cheap cups and saucers, images of gods and goddesses. It was the result of the enterprise of Maharaja Manindrachandra Nandi and Baikunthanath Sen of Berhampore. The workshop had up-to-date German and English machinery and up-to-date furnaces. It employed S. Deb, a ceramic expert, who studied at the Higher Institute of Technology in Tokyo. The firm began to expand and found a local as well as an export market in ink-pots, gallipots, insulators, cups, saucers, plates and dolls.<sup>34</sup> Cigarette factories also sprang up—the Globe Cigarette Co., the Calcutta Cigarette Co. and the East India Cigarette Manufacturing Co. These factories imported modern cigarette-making machines and manufactured cheap



cigarettes which sold at ten for a pice. The Globe (20-21 Tangra Road, Calcutta) was the largest cigarette factory in Bengal which had 487 workmen in 1911.<sup>35</sup> The Calcutta Flour Mills Association was formed in 1905 and dealt in flour, *atta*, *sujeer* etc. The mills were spread out in the different parts of Calcutta—Hatibagan, Raja Bazar, Ultadanga, Manicktala, Narikeldanga, Kalabagan, Sikdarbagan, Nandanbagan, Goabagan.<sup>36</sup> The Bengal Chemical was making good progress and it raised its capital to 3 lakhs in 1908 and paid a dividend of 6 per cent. Its factory (82 Manicktola Main Road) had 190 workmen in 1911.<sup>37</sup> The firm of K. L. Mukherjee and Co. of Salkhia was still working.<sup>38</sup>

The boycott movement and 'Buy Swadeshi' campaign gave a great stimulus to the handicrafts. L.S.S. O'Malley, author of the Bengal District Gazetteers, remarks that the cottage industries would have been extinct but for the impetus of the Swadeshi.<sup>39</sup> Cotton-weaving and silk-weaving had again revived; the tradition of Santipur *muslin* and Farasdanga *mulmuls* and *muga* was not to die out. Cotton cloths (*dhuties*, *saris*, *chadars* and *gamchhas*) began to be woven in large quantities in the districts. The *Bengalee* wrote on 24 February 1906: "There is at present not a village in Bengal where the handloom is not busy weaving cotton fabrics". The introduction of the Serampore handloom, which is the fly-shuttle loom invented by Kay, contributed to the progress of cotton-weaving. The Serampore handloom was much in demand and factories were started to manufacture the new handloom, first under Ghosh, Chaudhury and Co., then under Ghosh, Palit and Co. and then under P. N. Dey. In 1908, 10,000 such looms were working.<sup>40</sup> Bengalis also took up the manufacture of a variety of consumer-goods, such as umbrellas, tin boxes, steel trunks, nibs, pencils, hand-made paper, ink, cutlery, combs, safety pins, hair pins, matches etc.<sup>41</sup> and these goods were displayed in exhibitions which had become a regular feature of the Swadeshi movement.

Sister Nivedita gave a new call to the people: "The channels of distribution and the small shops—which are the real distributing centres in every city—have been so long in the hands of the foreign trade.... These small shops must be recaptured by the Swadeshi".<sup>42</sup> The slogan was taken up, and shops run by Bengalis sprang up not only in and around Calcutta, but also in the *mufassil* districts. These shops supplied all kinds of consumer goods. The retail trade in Manchester goods and other commodities was, however, controlled by the Marwaris who had made Burra-bazar their citadel.

### *Pattern of Economy*

With the end of the Swadeshi we reach the period of World War I. The Bengal we know today was emerging in all its familiar outline by this time.

It was a period of industrial transition. In a number of industries technical developments had progressed sufficiently far to provide a basis for production of a factory type. We now hear of capitals running into several thousands being invested in industries. The domestic system was being replaced by or was interlaced with the capitalist system, and along with the artisan the industrial worker made his appearance. The giant managing agency firms had established their grip on tea, jute, coal mines and engineering works. Bengali enterprise led to the starting of cotton mills, tannery and pottery and chemical works, banks and insurance companies. Small-scale cottage industries had revived after a period of decay and stagnation. A peculiar feature of Bengali enterprises of the period is the interlocking of interests of landlords and merchants. The rajas and maharajas financed inland shipping, banks and insurance companies, in which merchants also played their part. Landlords and merchants also dominated in the newly formed Bengal National Chamber of Commerce which was functioning as the organ of the rising Bengali bourgeoisie.<sup>43</sup>

The pace of industrial development was slow and the Bengali bourgeoisie was still weak as a class. Bengal looked at the time like a factory house where capital formed more capital with the help of indigenous raw materials and labour, but went back to the country from which it came, so that very little capital was left that could be ploughed back into the country where it was formed.

## NOTE

1. Sinha : *Economic History of Bengal*, Vol. 1, pp. 90-96.
2. Tripathi : *Trade and Finance in the Bengal Presidency (1793-1833)*, p. 18.
3. *Ibid*, p. 11. Some of the prominent agency houses were Messrs. Fergusson, Fairlies & Co.; Paxton, Cockerell and Delisle; Colvins and Bazett.
4. *Ibid*, p. 250.
5. *Ibid*, p. 138.
6. *Ibid*, pp. 139-40.
7. *Ibid*, p. 251.
8. *Burdwan District Gazetteer*, p. 130.
9. Banerji, B. N. : *Sambad Patre Sekaler Katha*, Vol. II, pp. 340-41.
10. Sinha, Nirmalchandra : *Indo-British Economy*, p. 45.
11. Tripathi : *op. cit.* p. 250.
12. Banerji, B. N. : *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 167.
13. Sinha, Nirmalchandra : *op. cit.* p. 25.
14. *Ibid*, p. 37.
15. *Bengalee*, 28 January 1905 ; *Howrah District Gazetteer*, p. 108.
16. *24 Parganas District Gazetteer*, p. 153; *Bengalee* (Editor—Surendranath), 22 September 1908.
17. Advertisement of the firm in *Antarjatik* (Editor—Vivekananda Mukherjee), February, 1958.
18. *New India* (Editor—Bipinchandra Pal), 7 January 1903.
19. Haridas Mukherjee and Uma Mukherjee : *The Origins of the National Education Movement*, p. 284.
20. *Ibid*, pp. 283-84.
21. *Ibid*, p. 285.
22. *Bengalee*, 2 January 1906.
23. *Ibid*, 19 January 1906.
24. *Ibid*, 20 January 1906.
25. *Hooghli District Gazetteer*, p. 181.
26. *Bengalee*, 28 October 1908.
27. *Ibid*, 3 January 1908.
28. *Ibid*, 1 August 1908.
29. *Ibid*, 14 October 1908.
30. *Ibid*, 11 October 1908.

31. *Ibid*, 25 December 1908.
32. *Ibid*, 4 December 1908.
33. *Ibid*, 4 January 1908.
34. Cumming, *Review of the position and prospects of industries in Bengal in 1908*, quoted by O'Malley in *24 Parganas District Gazetteer*.
35. *24 Parganas District Gazetteer*, pp. 150-1 ; *Bengalee*, 11 January 1906.
36. *Bengalee*, 2 January 1906.
37. *24 Parganas District Gazetteer*, p. 153.
38. *Howrah District Gazetteer*, p. 108.
39. *Ibid*, p. 98; *Hooghli District Gazetteer*, p. 182; *Ibid*, p. 184.
40. *Ibid*, p. 184.
41. *24 Parganas District Gazetteer*, p. 147; *Bengalee*, 6 January 1906 ; *Ibid*, 2 April 1906.
42. *Bengalee*, 4 April 1906.
43. *Report of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, 1913-15*  
List of the Office-bearers of the Chamber in 1913-15 :  
President—Raja Rishee Case Law.  
Vice-Presidents—Raja Pearymohan Mukherjee.  
Rai Janakinath Roy.  
Rai Sreenath Pal.  
Rai Hariram Goenka.  
Hony. Secretary—Rai Sitanath Roy Bahadur.

## BIPINCHANDRA PAL

*Jnananjan Pal*

Bipinchandra Pal was born on November 7, 1858, at the village home of his parents at Poil in the district of Sylhet, now included in eastern Pakistan. His father, Ramchandra Pal was employed as a judicial officer under the British Government. He gave up his service later to settle down in Sylhet town and practise as a lawyer. Bipinchandra was the only son of his parents. He had a sister by name Kripa; they were not the only issues though, several others were born but they died very young. Bipinchandra's mother was named Narayanee.

The motive which impelled Ramchandra Pal to leave Government service and start practising as a lawyer in Sylhet town was to give his son a good modern education. District towns in those days were the only places where high schools were opened either by European Christian missionaries or the Government or both. Ramchandra Pal rose to eminence at the Sylhet bar. He had however no English education; he was a good Persian scholar like many educated Hindus of the upper classes of those days. Ramchandra Pal was a liberal Hindu of the orthodox type. This was due to the composition of his culture, a mixing of Hindu ritualism and Indian Islamic thought. A strong-willed man, he never submitted to any social custom which his reason thought to be wrong. He was loving by nature, but his affection for his children, particularly for his son, did not find expression in exuberance. It was always subdued. More

subdued still was Narayanee's love for her son. Theirs was a well-to-do family; and in their spacious dwelling house at town lived a number of children of their relations. Narayanee's love and care of them were in no measure less than what young Bipinchandra received from her. Children take their lessons not so much from what they are taught as from what they feel and see around them. Bipinchandra had a natural training in self-help and selflessness from the atmosphere of his home. It was unconscious, and for that reason was perhaps more deep rooted than what it would otherwise have been.

Bipinchandra passed the Entrance or the School Final examination from the Sylhet Government High School in 1874, and came to Calcutta for higher studies. He was not a diligent student at school. He read more 'outside' books than prescribed texts, and indulged in 'dreams of literary eminence'. While at school he wrote poems and essays, some of which were published in the periodicals of Dacca of the time. Dacca was the cultural centre of eastern Bengal at that time, a position it holds still.

Calcutta is a commercial city now. In Bipinchandra's school days its commerce was as much in ideas as in merchandise. It was pre-eminently the centre of the new thought which contact with modern European ideas through the British connection brought to this country. The notes of freedom and humanism of the French Revolution were the main springs of this new thought. These were also, as has been repeatedly stressed by Bipinchandra, the characteristic notes of the age-long culture of Bengal. This explained why of all the Indian provinces the movement of modern awakening in India had its birth in Bengal, and held in such strong grip the mind and thought of its youthful intellectuals. The movement of new awakening may be said to have started with Rammohan Roy in Bengal. Rammohan had a brief period to work in Calcutta, from about 1814 to 1829, before he left for England. This short period was

amazingly fruitful of lasting good to India. It materially helped the moral and intellectual reawakening of an ancient people. Bengal and India felt the throbbing of a new life within her. She was awake from her long slumber. The movement of Rammohan received new strength and vitality and was crystallised into organisations at the hands of his followers, Debendranath Tagore, Rajnarain Bose, Iswar-chandra Vidyasagar and others. This happened during the two or three decades that followed the death of Rammohan Roy in Bristol in 1833.

The great revolt of 1857, in the words of Bipinchandra Pal, 'left the population in the country particularly in Bengal, absolutely cold'. One reason was that 'they belonged to a generation that had seen and suffered from the anarchy and disorder of immediate pre-British rule'. Another reason was that a movement of awakening had already set in through India's political connection with Britain; and our intelligentsia wanted the British rule to continue for a period to fulfil the promise of the renaissance. The dissemination of modern ideas may be said to have started systematically in Bengal with the founding of the Hindu College in 1817, and was continued by the institution of the Universities of Calcutta in 1857.

The early Bengal renaissance was in full bloom when Bipinchandra came to Calcutta in 1875 and was admitted as a student in the first year class of the Presidency College. Colleges and universities are however not normal repositories of new ideas. These are often to be found in the natural environment of the movements of the time. The Brahmo Samaj was the first socio-religious movement in modern Bengal. It was followed by a movement of literary renaissance. These reacted on our political consciousness, and under Surendranath's inspiration the first democratic political movement had its birth among us about 1875.

Bipinchandra was an enrolled student of the Presidency College, but he was perhaps not as regular in his classes as

he was at a book-shop in front of his college. It was called the Canning Library; and young Bipinchandra had the run of this book-shop through the generosity of its proprietor. He read here Bankimchandra's writings, Hemchandra's poems, and the essays, novels, dramas and poems of other authors, both Bengali and English, to his liking and choice. He lived his student life thus in the free atmosphere of a broad culture, broader perhaps than what the four walls of his college could offer.

But to assess the life of the mufassil students of those days, we have to see them not in their class-rooms but in their hostels or messes as they were called. Bipinchandra stayed in a 'mess' with his life-long friend Dr. Sundari Mohan Das, which was known as the Sylhet mess. They lived here the natural life of young boys, pure and healthy. 'During leisure hours they sang and danced, and indulged in all sorts of satire and mimicry', and they attended the Bengalee theatres not unoften. On the Bengalee stage were produced dramas, some of which were openly political or patriotic. '*Bharat Mata*' or 'Mother India' was one of them; it was an opera. There were several of these messes grouped according to districts. The mess at 33 Mussalmanpara Lane earned a special distinction for its 'liberal religious and social views'. Among the inmates of this mess were Ananda-mohan Bose, Dwarakanath Ganguly, Dr. P. K. Ray and Dr. Aghorenath Chatterjee. All of them attained high public positions later in life. The mufassil students may be said to have formed a class by themselves. The strength and vitality of the student movement in Bengal during the eighties of the last century were largely built upon the idealism of these youths, who thronged to Calcutta mostly from the villages of the eastern Bengal districts.

Bipinchandra was gradully drawn to the movement of religious and social revolt of the Brahmo Samaj. Among the Brahmo leaders it was Pandit Sibnath Sastri who attracted him most. Sibnath's ideal of freedom, he felt, was larger than



that of Keshubchunder Sen. Sibnath was the leader in those days of the younger Brahmos. Some of them were organised under his leadership into a group, more or less on the model of a Catholic brotherhood. Bipinchandra had his initiation in this group in the autumn of 1877. A solemn ceremony took place, and they took several vows drawn up by Pandit Sibnath Sastri himself. The first vow was against current image worship and caste domination of Hindu society. The second one declared that self-government was the only form of government ordained by God. It implied that the present foreign government of the country, not being self-government, had no claim upon the moral allegiance of the people. But considering actual conditions they would obey the laws of this Government. But they pledged themselves that 'they would not, even if faced with extreme poverty and economic destitution, and all the miseries consequent upon it, take service under this Government'. The other vows related to the ways of achieving self-government for the people. They would devote themselves to the education of the masses, and of the women specially. The disabilities of women were to be removed, including bar to widow remarriage. They would make themselves physically fit also, so that when the time came they could shoulder the responsibility of defending their country against outside invasion and internal anarchy. They were sworn to poverty, spending not more than their needs, and dedicating their lives to the service of the nation and humanity. This initiation profoundly influenced Bipinchandra, and may be said to have given him the moral strength to face the trials of his new life.

Bipinchandra failed in his examination at the University. But it was not as serious in effect as was his breach with his father, which was now almost complete. His father was a liberal Hindu. A liberal Hindu was he whose mind could take in new ideas, but whose obligations to his society did not permit him to disobey its laws and customs. Bipinchandra violated these restrictions openly. He was built in the mould of a rebel, and not of a liberal. His differences with his father

inevitably therefore widened, and could not be expected to be reconciled early. Bipinchandra's father stopped sending him any help; and Bipinchandra, a young man of twenty, found himself alone, among strangers in a big city, to fight life's battle. He had lost his mother sometime back, and his father left him now.

Bipinchandra had acquired a fair literary competence through wide reading. This helped him to get the headmastership of a high school in Cuttack soon after he left college in 1879. From 1879 to about 1899 (he went to England for the first time in September 1898), he worked as headmaster of more than one school, in Sylhet after Cuttack in 1880, and in Bangalore after Sylhet in 1881. He took up journalism also seriously; started the Bengalee weekly *Paridarshak* in Sylhet (1880), joined the *Bengal Public Opinion* as assistant to the Editor (1882), was appointed assistant editor to the *Tribune* of Lahore (1887), besides doing journalistic and literary work, including writing in Bengalee a biography of Queen Victoria in 1887.

Bipinchandra was an enthusiastic Brahmo preacher since early youth. This helped him to be an effective public speaker also. He joined the Congress at its second session in Calcutta in 1886 as a delegate from Sylhet, and attended the third session at Madras in 1887. He spoke in this Congress, on a resolution for the repeal of the Arms Act. By this speech he almost leapt to an all-India fame. Bipinchandra was serious in his political work; he was one of those who had their political training under the inspiration of Surendranath and the Indian Association. The Indian Association was started in 1876—nearly ten years before the birth of the Congress—and was the first people's political organisation for all-India. It was through the efforts of Bipinchandra and the young Bengal delegates that a democratic change was made in the constitution of the Congress in 1887, by instituting the Subjects Committee, wherein all the delegates were represented.

Bipinchandra lost his father in 1886, but there was complete reconciliation between father and son a little before the latter's death. The old father appreciated at last the courage of his son in following his own convictions, and the rebel son, now a mature youth of nearly thirty, understood something perhaps of his father's great love for him. Within about four years of this, Bipinchandra lost his first wife due to a sudden attack of fever. She was twenty-eight then, and Bipinchandra thirty-two. The sorrow was almost unbearable to him. It led him to an intensive study of the *Upanishads*, the *Vedanta* and the *Geeta*, and also to the writings of Emerson. He found peace in his mind. The study revealed to him also something of the grandeur of our spiritual inheritance. The same year he got an appointment as Secretary and Librarian to the Calcutta Public Library. He was there for about a year and half only, but it gave him an opportunity for systematic reading. All these added fresh strength and vitality to his intellectual life, and proved valuable for the public work as speaker and writer to which he was being drawn steadily all these years. He himself felt about this time that these were his life's work. He became an unordained missionary of the Brahmo Samaj, preaching not so much its creed as its idealism. It was about this time that he received a new inspiration in his inner life through his initiation at the hands of his *guru* or spiritual guide, Pandit Bijaykrishna Goswami.

He went to England in 1898 on a scholarship granted by the British and Foreign Unitarian Association for theological study, and was admitted to the Manchester College, Oxford. He did not stay here for the full two year course. He gave up his scholarship after a year, and utilised his stay in England to preach Hindu theism, besides political propaganda for India. He had an invitation from the National Temperance Association of New York to visit the States on a four months' lecturing tour. He went from England to U. S. and addressed American audiences on temperance and also on the religion and culture of India.

It was in America that he met Sister Nivedita for the first time, an acquaintance that ripened into friendship based on their common love for India. He had an experience in America which changed the whole course of his future life. A friend there told him that he must work for the emancipation of his country first. "India must be able", said this American friend, "to look civilised humanity horizontally into the face" to deliver her message to the modern world; he added that a "free world would not receive its lessons, however true or lofty these might be, from a slave". Bipinchandra felt the irresistible force of this argument; and returning to India in 1900, he threw himself with all the enthusiasm of his ardent nature into the movement for the emancipation of his country from British slavery. This practically closed the early or the formative period of his life.

The years from about 1877, when he took the vow of a life of dedicated service to India and humanity, to about the end of 1900, when he threw himself into the movement of political freedom of his country,—may be said to be the period of his preparation for the great task to which he was to engage himself now. He had learnt during these twenty and more years of his early youth to remain firm in his convictions against all obstacles. He had also passed through sorrows and privations, leading a more or less restless life until he found the way of complete surrender to his Maker. Under Sibnath's inspiration he knew freedom to be one, and that it embraced all the phases of a nation's life. And the inspiration of Bijaykrishna, a universally acknowledged holy man of modern Bengal, silently worked in him, revealing to him the soul of his country's great civilisation and culture.

## 2

Bipinchandra started a weekly journal in English in 1901, and named it 'New India'. It preached a new political ideal that differed completely from the Congress policy of agitation. In 1902 it said, almost prophetically: "Agitation is not, in any sense, a test of true patriotism. That test is self-help

and self-sacrifice; and the time perhaps is coming, faster than we had thought, when Indian patriotism would be put to this test. Will it be able to stand it? Time will show". In this vein the journal continued to preach the philosophy of a new patriotism. For the first time perhaps in the history of our modern political movement, our politics was sought to be based upon a philosophy of thought, realistic as well as modern. The first issue of the journal said: "This new India is neither Hindu, though the Hindu unquestionably forms the original stock and staple of it, nor Mahomedan, though they have made very material contributions to it. . . . but is made up of the varied and valuable material supplied in successive stages of its evolution. . . . by them. . . . A nation is an organic whole. The new Indian nation is such an organic whole. Its component parts are Hindus and Mahomedans, and Parsees and Christians and the aboriginal tribes still living in the primitive stages of social evolution". The new Indian patriotism would therefore be what Bipinchandra called, 'composite patriotism'; and while demanding autonomy for India in relation to outside power, it would demand also "autonomy for every race and community in India itself". India would be a federation of all the communities inhabiting this great continent; and to make such federation possible, we must "religiously cultivate mutual respect, mutual love and an absolute toleration of our mutual differences".

But to attain our objective we must have complete political freedom. In the *Bande Mataram*, (1906) which was started as the daily organ in English of the new party, he wrote: "The time has come when in the interest of truth and civic advancement and freedom of the people, our British friends should be distinctly told that while we are thankful to them for all the kind things they have done all these years for us, and the ready sacrifices they have made to make our lot easy and their yoke light, we cannot any longer suffer ourselves to be guided by them in our attempts for political progress and emancipation. Their view-point

is not ours. They desire to make the Government in India popular without ceasing in any sense to be essentially British; we desire to make it autonomous, absolutely free of the British control". It was a bold statement to make in those days. But bolder still were the methods which the new party led by Bipinchandra, Aravinda and others wanted their countrymen to follow for the realisation of their objective of complete political freedom. In a series of five lectures delivered by Bipinchandra on the sea beach in Madras in 1907, the ideal and programme of advanced Indian politics were fully and unequivocally stated. The ideal was complete independence, and not colonial self-government under British control, which was the ideal of the Congress of those days. Colonial self-government under British control was an unreal ideal, he said; it would mean either no self-government for India or no control for Great Britain. But they could not hope to attain their objective by organised armed revolt. That was impossible. Their method therefore was passive resistance. They would remain peaceful and within the limits of the law, if the laws of the British Government respected the primary rights of civilised life. Boycott was a method of passive resistance; it would be used mainly as a political weapon, and not for mere economic ends. It would include therefore not only boycott of British goods but boycott of all voluntary association with the foreign Government in the country. That would kill the prestige of this Government, and would prepare the people for a general or political strike. This was the negative side of their programme. On the positive side, they would try to set up "a machinery of popular administration, running parallel to but independent of the existing administration of the Government". They would have their own village boards for meeting local needs, and arbitration committees for settling civic disputes. Education would be 'national' from the lowest to the highest or university stage. It would be modern and based on the experiences of our life. It would

combine scientific and liberal education with technical training. On the economic side it was not the boycott of all British goods that was proposed. Special stress was laid upon the boycott of four items,—cloth, salt, sugar and enamelled ware, besides generally all articles of luxury. Machinery would not be boycotted, nor other essential goods needed to build up a modern national life. That was the programme of national work, stated briefly. And Bipinchandra Pal observed that he believed that what had never happened in history might happen in India, namely a “popular revolutionary propaganda might attain its end absolutely by passive and peaceful means”.

The British rulers and their imperialist agents both in India and in their home country regarded Bipinchandra as their great enemy. The *Historians' History of the World* described him as the great preacher of sedition. Lord Minto, the Indian Viceroy of the time, wanted to deport him. The utterances of Bipinchandra Pal were utterly incompatible with the continuance of British rule, was the opinion expressed by Sir Valentine Chirol in his book entitled *Indian Unrest*, published in 1911. But these characterisations of Bipinchandra Pal or his deportation even would not kill the movement. No movement was the creation of an individual. Bipinchandra was only one of its earliest thought-leaders and perhaps its most powerful preacher. The Curzonian partition of Bengal in 1905 caused an unprecedented upheaval in the country. Surendranath was its natural leader; but the movement as led by him had the limited objective of annulment of the partition. It was not a political freedom movement in the truest sense of the words. That was the special work of Rabindranath, Bipinchandra and Aravinda. Rabindranath and Bipinchandra, and Aravinda also, wanted not a narrow political freedom movement even; they aimed at a spiritual renaissance of the nation. There were others as their close associates in Bengal. Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, Asvinikumar Datta, Monoranjan Guha-Thakurta and Sister Nivedita were among those most noted. The supporters included

Ashutosh Chowdhury, Abdul Rasul, Hirendranath Datta and Chittaranjan Das. And their following were practically the entire educated youngmen of Bengal. The movement was not confined to Bengal either. Tilak led a powerful nationalist movement in Maharashtra, and Lajpat Rai in the Punjab. The personality of Tilak made him the leader of the new movement for all India.

The foreign Government in the country was now determined to crush this movement by repression, and adopted as ruthless a method as any known to modern history. It used special weapons also to sap its vitality. It separated the Moderates from the Extremists, alienated the Mahomedans from the Hindus, and sowed seeds of inter-racial and inter-provincial jealousies. The impatient young idealists retaliated, meeting violence with violence. The work of intellection that had started with such great promise had no field practically left therefore for work. The conflict was no longer on the moral plane. Bipinchandra always thought that the struggle of a dependent people to be free was a moral struggle. But the alien Government by ruthless repression brought it down to the physical plane. Rabindranath moved away from it. Aravinda had to seek safety in Pondichery. Tilak and Lajpat Rai were imprisoned or deported out of India, and Bipinchandra, almost a lone figure, as soon as he came out of prison, serving a sentence of six months for refusing to give evidence against Aravinda in what was known as the *Bande Mataram* sedition case, left for England to live the life of an enforced exile. This happened in 1908. The five or six years of the first movement of Swadeshi and Swaraj may thus be said to have ended.

It may perhaps be said also to have failed, if we judge it from the outside. But if we try to see deeper, we will perhaps agree that it has not failed. No moral movement can really completely fail. It aroused among the educated classes a new spirit that changed their whole outlook of life. The Bengal of 1907-08 was not what it was in 1900 or so. The change was



perceptible in all the phases of our national life,—in religion, in social consciousness and in political ideal also. It gave birth to a new literature, and a new orientation in art. It focussed a new emphasis on scientific and technical education; and led new efforts in economic and industrial life. It created a large number of national songs, which Bipinchandra described as the hymnology of the new patriotism. For a movement that was allowed to work normally and in the open for a few years only, the achievement may well be called remarkable. Its thought-leaders, as has already been indicated, were mainly three, Rabindranath, Aravinda and Bipinchandra. Bipinchandra was its philosopher in a special sense, as Rabindranath was its poet and Aravinda was the embodiment of all that we understood by new patriotism.

Bipinchandra differed from Aravinda in the matter of organising a secret movement of violence side by side with the open political propaganda for freedom. This would make, he thought, physical clash with the Government inevitable, and the superior organised brute force at the command of the Government would kill the open movement for political awakening at an early stage of its growth. So fundamental was his difference with Aravinda on this matter that he was made to cease his connection with the *Bande Mataram* as its editor within three months of its birth; and he, it may be noted, was its founder too. Bipinchandra was also against an absolute breach with the Congress, which happened in Surat in 1907. He could not attend that session as he was serving his sentence at the Buxar jail at that time. That breach gave the foreign ruling power an opportunity to embark upon a fresh policy of repression, more ruthless than previous. This in turn led the young patriots,—in Bengal, Maharashtra, the Punjab and Madras to methods of terrorism. The propaganda for political freedom, which in Bengal was a part of the all-round freedom movement, went underground before it could attain full maturity. Bipinchandra had practically no longer any role to play in the movement for freedom or

Swaraj, because there was really no open or surface Swaraj movement in the country.

## 3

Bipinchandra stayed in England for three years, from 1908 to 1911. It was fruitful in a new way. He had preached complete independence for India during 1902-07. While in England he developed a new political thought, not different indeed from his old ideal of nationalism but with a new emphasis on internationalism. Bipinchandra was not a narrow nationalist. Even during the early Swadeshi movement of 1905-07, on the first anniversary of the partition of Bengal (16 October 1906), which was proclaimed as the Nation Day, he wrote in the columns of the *Bande Mataram*: "We dedicate this day to that patriotism which finds its fulfilment in humanity. We dedicate it also to that humanity which is the only eternal revelation of God to man". He said again in the course of a speech in Madras in 1907 that "patriotic sentiment must be cultivated along with the cultivation of love for humanity". These were no mere sentiments; deep thinking was at their back. "The family, the tribe, the race, the nation" he said, "formed an ascending series of social evolution"; each succeeding stage was wider and more complex than the preceding one or all the preceding ones joined together. The circle of human association enlarged as man progressed from one stage to another, to move "towards that universal humanity which was the ideal-end of all social evolution". While in England Bipinchandra was able to give practical shape to this ideal by evolving a new political thought.

In England he had an unusual opportunity of seeing the working of world forces about him. It was not possible, he saw, for any nation to live singly as a self-sufficient unit, isolated from the rest of the world. Empires were larger social units than nations, but they were built on the right of conquest; and no human association could endure on the master and slave relation. It was not the true empire-idea even, he

said. "The true empire-idea was not, in fact, a political but essentially a social idea". And the British Empire, if it wanted to endure, must be built or re-built on a new ideal. It must be built on the federal idea. The federal idea, he said, was higher than the empire-idea, because it allowed absolute autonomy to the parts (or the different members) within the "perfected unity of the whole". Bipinchandra would not call such reconstructed imperial structure (if and when that were possible) an empire; he would call it a "cooperative partnership". He pleaded for a reconstitution of the British Empire on these lines, namely, a federal union of India (made free or completely autonomous first) on the one side, and Great Britain and her self-governing colonies on the other. It was a new idea, almost prophesying the development of the British Empire into a Commonwealth; and as W. T. Stead, the famous editor of the *Review of Reviews* said, it required a width of outlook and capacity for impartial thinking not commonly found among politicians. W. T. Stead wrote a character-sketch of Bipinchandra Pal in his *Review of Reviews* in 1911, and he ended it with the following observation: "Mr. Pal's views as to the desirability, in the interest of humanity, of the close working partnership between Britain and India are well worthy of consideration of the statesman and the philosopher, regardless of nationality". Bipinchandra Pal thought that if the federal ideal were accepted, it would reconcile the problem of India's freedom with the reasonable interests of the British Empire, and also would be a guarantee for permanent world-peace.

Bipinchandra came back to India at the end of 1911, and devoted himself to the propagation of his new political faith. It was an uphill task. The British imperialists, until or unless they were faced with the possibility of total eclipse, were not likely to shed their colour prejudice or be cured of their greed for power and industrial profit, and listen to these words of political wisdom. The educated among the Indians would have no objection to accept in theory the

federal ideal as a formula of larger union than unitary national states, but could not believe that such a consummation was possible for India in the near future. In fact, the politically minded sections in our country were completely overwhelmed at that time with a sense of utter frustration. It was therefore more or less a lone effort for Bipinchandra, but he persisted. He started a monthly journal in English in 1913 and named it the *Hindu Review*. The journal stood for 'God, Humanity and the Motherland'; practically it would work, it said, for four ideas: "(1) The preservation of the distinctive genius and character of Hindu culture and civilisation; (2) The promotion of sympathetic and reverent study of the other world-cultures, e.g. Christian and Islam, represented in the composite life of modern India; (3) The continuance of the British connection through the gradual building up of a federal constitution for the present association called the British Empire, a federation in which India shall be an equal co-partner with Great Britain; and (4) The advancement of Universal Federation".

With Tilak he joined the Home Rule Movement started by Mrs. Besant, and rejoined the Congress at the united session of that body in 1916 at Lucknow. But all his political writings and speeches during the whole period from 1912 to 1920 had federation as the central idea, a federation not only of the different regions but also of the different communities within India,—that would give autonomy to each within its own special sphere inside the unity of India as a whole—and a federal union of a free India with Great Britain and her self-governing colonies.

His emphasis on the need for an early reconciliation of India's conflict with Britain was based, among others, on a sinister development in India itself. To keep India under their perpetual subjection, the British rulers of this country deliberately fomented disunity between the Mahomedan population of this country and the Hindus. That process, started with the

movement of Sir Syed Ahmad in the seventies of the last century, was continued throughout the early decades of the present century. As a result, a movement of political pan-Islamism found a strong footing among the Mahomedans of this country. Bipinchandra saw the great dangers of this political pan-Islamism to the future of India. "The real cure of this mischievous religio-political movement, so far as India was concerned", he said in the course of an article headed Pan-Islamism in the *Hindu Review* in 1913, "must be found in the evolution of a federal government in India, forming part, as an equal among equals, of the larger federation of the present British Empire".

## 4

The First World War (1914-18) ended in a sudden and dramatic victory for Great Britain and her Allies. Bipinchandra had an opportunity of a third visit to England as member of a Congress and Home Rule League deputation led by Lokamanya Tilak. He saw there a great change in the economic outlook of the imperialists. The British Empire, they said, was composed of two parts, one self-governing and the other dependent. India belonged to the latter category. The development (the word they used for exploitation) of the dependent empire was necessary for "the very life of the self-governing empire". It meant that the policy would now be—a systematic exploitation of India not by Britain alone but by her self-governing colonies as well. India's cheap labour and her great natural resources were their chief attractions. She offered also "a great market for imperial industries". This was the new economic policy, which the British imperialists now sought to pursue in India.

There was also a change in the outlook of labour in Europe. It refused to be exploited in the way it was being exploited so long. A socialist economy, offering equal opportunity to all, was the new cry. Returning to India, Bipinchandra delivered an address on 'The World Situation & Ourselves' (14 December 1919), giving a picture of the changes in

England and Europe, and asking his countrymen to take an active interest in international affairs. He said: India should organise a Council of International Brotherhood and Peace, and have it affiliated to the Universal Brotherhood Congress as other countries had done. Rabindranath should fittingly be asked to be the President of this Indian Peace Council. Rabindranath had recently signed, he said, together with the other thought-leaders of the world—Anatole France, Romain Rolland, Bernard Shaw and others—a manifesto against war and for international peace. This manifesto said that power like ideas must belong to all. Labour, manual or mental, was honourable, and labour alone should be rewarded. These were the ideals also, Bipinchandra said, of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. A new world “was being born out of the travails of this great war.” The French Revolution had declared war against thrones and aristocracies. There was now a new declaration, a “declaration of war against the wealthy middle classes, the ruling classes in every European country”. “Today” he said “after the downfall of German militarism, after the destruction of the autocracy of the Czar, there has grown up all over the world a new power, the power of the people determined to rescue their legitimate rights—the right to live freely and happily without being exploited and victimised by the wealthier and the so-called higher classes”.

It was the duty of India, he said, to fall in line with this new great world movement. India had a special need for it also. It would help her to fight the danger of the new imperialist economic policy. In a book on *The New Economic Menace to India* (1920), he described in detail how the chains of a fresh economic slavery would be tied round India's neck in addition to her present political bondage,—the one strengthening the other,—if this menace materialised. He wanted India to fight this danger with all her strength, and suggested three main measures against it. One was the organisation of Indian labour. Indian labour “must have the same wages as British labourers relatively to the cost of living

in India, and there must be an absolute equalisation of the hours of work between Indian and British labour". That would prevent the exploitation of cheap Indian labour. Secondly, as a check for free exploitation of our great natural wealth, he suggested that "all excess profits must be taxed". "If we can put up a fight for these things", he said summing up, "namely, increased wages and shorter hours for our labourers, and the expropriation of all excess profits by the State, to be spent upon measures needed for the health, happiness and the intellectual and moral uplift of the Indian masses, we have not the least shadow and suspicion of a doubt that we can immediately form a close, intimate and helpful alliance with British, nay world labour. And we shall be able to use this alliance not only for our economic protection and salvation but also for the political emancipation of our people".

## 5

Bipinchandra was wedded to the ideal of universal humanity, but his ideal was the concrete universal and not what was called the abstract universal. "The universal", he said in his character sketch of Rabindranath (1913) "which ignores or negates the particulars is not true universal but only what is called the abstract universal". His universalism was a direct development of the ideal of Rammohan Roy, enriched by his own experiences of higher Vaishnavic realisations. The meaning of these realisations was revealed to him through the inspiration of the teachings of Bijaykrishna Goswami. The first fruit of it was his experience in the seclusion of his jail life at Buxur in 1907, an experience which Aravinda referred to in his Uttarpada speech as 'the realisation of God in man'. Aravinda had the same realisation at the Alipore jail almost at the same time. The supreme divinity of man became an abiding faith with Bipinchandra and found the basis for the cultivation of his ideal of universal humanity in the concrete. This was, he said, the highest modern ideal also, and awaited fulfilment in practical life, in social, economic and political structure, both in Europe and India.

In 1911 he gave us a 'constructive study of Indian thoughts and ideals' in a book entitled *The Soul of India*. "In Europe", he said, "the history of socio-ethical evolution has been.... from status through the revolt of right to the highest ideal of duty; in India, owing to her peculiar synthetic genius and the control of the course of social evolution not by rebels and reformers but by its spirit-illuminated saints and sages, the scheme of socio-ethical evolution has been directly from status to duty for its own sake". And he wanted India to follow her own genius in building up a modern life. The same thought he expressed to W.T. Stead also before leaving England in 1911. "What I want in India", he said, "is the growth of a great spiritual revival among the people". This must not be confused however with the movement of Hindu revivalism that had started in India in the late seventies of the last century. That was, in his view, mediaeval and reactionary. It tried to cling to the outer forms of Hindu culture that had outgrown their usefulness. Bipinchandra wanted to write a volume on 'The people of India', as a sister volume of his *Soul of India*, giving "a constructive study of social and economic life and institutions of India". Unfortunately for us, it could not be done. But his ideals of the political and economic structure of future Indian society are contained in his other writings, and particularly in his address at the Bengal Provincial Conference at Barisal in 1921.

This address was published later also separately under the title of *Swaraj: the Goal and the Way*. He wanted to define Swaraj as democratic Swaraj; and "the administrative machinery", he said, "cannot be of the unitary type". "Real democracy does not grow under a unitary system of government. It is also against our spirit and traditions, which have been essentially federal in character. Federation is the way to to democratic Swaraj. Provinces, grouped as far as possible, on the basis of a common language, will form the provincial units of this Indian Federation. And the districts will form the units of the provincial federations, and autonomous village communities will be the units of the district federations



and will be the foundations upon which the whole federal structure will be built.

Bipinchandra almost foresaw the downfall of capitalism, and with it centralised class-ruled states. And if autonomous village communities are to be the basis of our political or state life, self-reliant co-operatives are to be the units of our productive or economic life. Village means, he said, land; and every villager-family must have some land of their own, "for economic independence of a very real kind". Our artisan classes were seldom landless in the past, and our craftsmen of the future also will not be deprived of their portions of land in their villages to produce their necessities and be engaged also in creating articles that will enrich the life of the entire village community. These were his political and economic ideals. On these he wanted to reconstruct the political and economic life of India.

If these were his political and economic ideas and if he wanted a real spiritual revival among his people, and was above communal aspirations, one wondered what made him oppose so strongly the programme and policy of Non-co-operation initiated by Gandhiji. Many items of the Non-co-operation propaganda resembled closely, in appearance at least, the programme of the Swadeshi movement of 1905-07, of which Bipinchandra was an acknowledged leader. An easy way of explaining it would be that the country moved too fast for his aged and tired steps to keep pace with it. But he himself has left statements to clearly indicate the reasons for his differences with Gandhiji. He stated it specifically in a letter which he wrote in 1919 to Pandit Motilal Nehru, giving his reasons for ceasing his connection with *The Independent*, of which he was the editor at that time.

First and foremost of the reasons for his opposition to Gandhiji's programme and policy was the dominance of the Khilafat Committee in the Non-co-operation movement. "It spelt a serious danger to our cause", said he. Gandhiji's view was different. Gandhiji openly said that the

Khilafat had the foremost place in his thought. In Gandhiji's opinion our warm support of the Khilafat would promote Hindu-Moslem unity. In Bipinchandra's view it would not, if we meant by it real and permanent communal amity. They were being fooled, he said, by the Khilafatists, who were really Pan-Islamists. That was his prime reason. There was also a "fundamental conflict of inner spirit". "Blind reverence for Gandhiji's leadership", he felt, "would kill people's freedom of thought and would paralyse by the deadweight of unreasoning reverence their individual conscience". "I am not blind", he continued in the letter above referred to, "to the possibilities of good in the great hold that Mahatmaji has got on the populace; but there is the other side; and in the earlier stages of democracy these personal influences, when they are due to the inspirations of mediaeval religious sentiments, are simply fatal to its future. This does not remove the inherited slave-mentality which is the root of all our degradations and miseries".

It is time that these views of Bipinchandra Pal were correctly assessed in the light of future developments. The policy of joining the Khilafat agitation with the political freedom movement ended in disastrous results for India. The Non-co-operation Movement did not also develop a creative thought movement as the Swadeshi movement had done. The all-pervading personality of Gandhiji left really no room for such development. These, however, did not take away from the value of the movement of non-violent non-co-operation, and Gandhiji's leadership of it. Non-co-operation brought out into the surface again the people's resistance movement, and that on a scale not dreamt of before. Without it our freedom movement would not have gathered that irresistible force which resulted in the emancipation of our country from foreign yoke.

## 6

Bipinchandra was a noted writer of serious essays in Bengali. A fragment only of these has been published in

book-form till now; the entire (excepting, of course, the topical ones) would fill several volumes. He started writing in Bengali when he was twenty-four or so, and continued it till his death at the age of seventy-four. In these could be traced the development of his mind—from his youth when he was a protestant and a reformer to the period of early maturity when he became a passionate patriot, loving everything of his country. One could see also in these how with ripening years a new light illumined for him the whole course of the evolution of his country's civilisation and culture, and he felt that India must not live a life of isolation from the rest of the world. The most fruitful period of his life as a Bengali essayist started perhaps from about 1912, when he returned from England.

He became a regular contributor to the leading Bengali journals of his day. He wrote, among others, on the philosophy of Bengalee Vaishnavism and Bengal Vaishnavic lyrics, contributed series of studies on the lives of some of the makers of modern India, analysed canons of literary criticism, besides giving us expositions of the deeper notes of some aspects of Hindu culture. He has left for us memories of his own life and times, which were published serially in Ramananda Chatterjee's monthly journal *Prabasi*; and he has given us an interpretative history of the movement of modern renaissance in Bengal from Rammohan onward in a series of essays which were published in *Bangabanee*. He wanted perhaps to write an analytical biography of Bijaykrishna Goswami but could only finish the first part of it.

Bipinchandra was intimately associated with the movements of labour organisations in Bengal. A printer and pressman by name Jitendranath Gupta ventured to start a labour journal in Bengali; he approached Bipinchandra; Bipinchandra named the journal *Samhati*, meaning 'organisation or consolidation', and helped it by his writings till the death of its founder, which happened within a few months

of his starting the journal. He died from the effects of lead poisoning.

If Bipinchandra was great as a writer, who could wield his pen with remarkable ability both in Bengalee and in English, he was perhaps greater still as a speaker. He was endowed with a voice that could reach tens of thousands of his hearers in open air gatherings when there were no mechanical aids to help the speaker. And, in the words of Srinivasa Shastri, he could speak "words hot with emotion, and subtly logical that invaded the whole soul of his listeners and set them aflame with a wild consuming desire". Srinivasa Shastri spoke thus of his Madras lectures in 1907, and added that "oratory had never dreamed of such triumphs in India; the power of the spoken word had never been demonstrated on such a scale". The same was true of his oratorical powers in Bengali also. He spoke extempore, and abstruse philosophical subjects were made attractive even to lay listeners by the powers of his exposition.

But that which distinguished him most and was the source of his powers as a writer and a speaker was his capacity for thinking. Thinking was natural to him. Hirendranath Datta once said of Bipinchandra Pal that he was a consecutive thinker. Consecutive thinking was that kind of thinking which built systems in the past in India.

Bipinchandra never refused to pay the price of his independent thinking. He valued freedom as he valued nothing else, not only national freedom but also and above everything else personal freedom. For the freedom of his conscience and conviction, he sacrificed his family when he was a boy of eighteen. He stood up against Keshubchunder Sen as a youngman when the latter, as he felt, developed 'pontifical tendencies'. And he carried the same independent spirit till the end of his days. He faced poverty and he faced aloofness of his friends, but he did not submit to anything which he did not believe. His views, it might be said, changed

more than once, as was natural for a thing that had organic growth; but his opinions he never changed for personal profit or preferment. Power, position, money, and even the applause of his countrymen had no lure for him when it was a question of his conscience or his conviction.

The last ten or twelve years of his life he passed in aloofness and in poverty. He died at the age of seventy-four on May 20 1932. Few people, except his relations and close friends, followed his bier to the cremation ground. But he died, so far as one could feel, a contented soul, because he never sold his self. His countrymen will perhaps want to know some day,—may be many years after his death,—what he thought on the many problems of nation-building that may baffle solution at their hands. That way thought lives and passes on its truths to coming generations. A thinker dies, as is natural, but his thought, if there be truth in it, lives on.

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## CONTENTS:

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2. *The Ganges-bath* (16 October 1906)
3. *The Rakhi-Day* (10 October 1906)
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7½ × 4½; pp. iv, 144, Index ii.

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- i. Lecture. *The New Movement*
- ii. Lecture. *The Gospel of Swaraj*
- iii. Lecture. *Swaraj : Its Ways and Means*



iv. Lecture. *Boycott*

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#### SJ. BEPIN CHANDRA PAL. HIS LIFE AND SPEECHES

An advertisement of this book ("5th edition revised and enlarged," price six annas), to be had of Kalpataru Agency, appears on Cover 2 of CHARACTER SKETCH OF SJ AUROBINDO GHOSH (1909?). I have not seen a copy.

BABU BIPINCHANDRA PAL. pp.181.

Printed at the Guardian Press, Mount Road, Madras.

The lectures delivered in Madras by Bipinchandra Pal in 1907, about which Srinivasa Sastri wrote that "Oratory had never dreamt of such triumphs in India; the power of the spoken word had never been demonstrated on such a scale", were issued by more than one publisher, as the preceding entries show. The following contents are taken from a copy of a book in the possession of Sri Jnananjan Pal, from which the title-page and covers are missing; the folio heading is here used as the title of the book. According to Sri Jnananjan Pal, this is a copy of the fifth edition of SPEECHES published by Ganesh, Madras.

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"Speeches of Babu Bepin Chandra Pal":

1. *Madras Congress 1887 : Arms Act*
2. *The New Movement*
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4. *Indians in South Africa : Madras Sympathy*
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7. *Contribution of Islam to Indian Nationality*
8. *National Education*

9. *Repeal of the Indian Emigration Act*
10. *The National Social Conference*
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Published by Srishchandra Gupta, Eastern Publishing Company, Calcutta. The author's Preface is dated August 18, 1908.

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ENDEAVOUR SOCIETY, CALCUTTA. PRICE TWO PICE, 1909.

The above details, and the following notice, are taken from *The Modern Review*, March 1910, "Reviews of Books."

"This is a short article reprinted from the *Unitarian World*. What marks off Mr. Bepin Chandra Pal from the old school of politicians is principally this, that he is steeped in ancient Indian Culture and has a sounder grasp and truer perception of Indian history,

philosophy and sociology. To our mind he is therefore specially fitted to be the exponent of one who is so truly representative of all that is best in the national culture as the great Raja, and in this short article he has succeeded in laying his finger on the key note of the Raja's manifold activities. According to him, the chief value of the Raja's labours lies in his fight against the forces of mediaevalism in India, and the movement which he initiated was the movement of the Indian Renaissance, in religion, economics, politics, jurisprudence and education. . . "

I have not seen a copy.

## 10

OM | BANDE MATARAM. | THE SPIRIT OF | INDIAN NATION-  
ALISM. | BY | BIPIN CHANDRA PAL. | WITH AN INTRODUCTION  
BY | W. T. STEAD. | PUBLISHED BY THE HIND NATIONALIST AGENCY, |  
140, SINCLAIR ROAD, WEST KENSINGTON, | LONDON. | 1910.

7½ × 4½; pp. viii, 141.

The author's Preface is dated 15 October, 1910, in the course of which he says: "This small book had already been sent to the Press sometime before Mr. [Valentine] Chirol started his recent articles on the Indian Unrest in the columns of "The Times". It is not, therefore, a reply to him, but the reader will see that some of the most vital points raised by Mr. Chirol had already been anticipated in the following pages".

## CONTENTS :

## [Part 1]

1. *The Spirit of Indian Nationalism*
2. *The Partition of Bengal*
3. *The Boycott Movement*
4. *National Education*
5. *The National Volunteers*

## [Part 2]

## The Leaders of the Nationalist Movement in Bengal :

1. *Srijut Asvini Kumar Datta*  
Written March 1909
2. *Srijut Krishna Kumar Mitra*  
Written April 1909
3. *Srijut Aravinda Ghose*  
Written July 1909
4. *Srijut Manoranjan Guha-Thakurta*  
Written May 1909

5. *Srijut Syam Sundar Chakravarti*

Written June 1909

6. *Chintamani; the Blind Beggar Patriot of Calcutta*

The first five character-sketches (Part 2) were reprinted in *INDIAN NATIONALISM : ITS PRINCIPLES AND PERSONALITIES* (1918) and are now available in *CHARACTER SKETCHES* (1957).

## 11

THE | SOUL OF INDIA. | A | CONSTRUCTIVE STUDY | OF |  
INDIAN THOUGHTS & IDEALS. | BY | BIPIN CHANDRA PAL. | PUB-  
LISHED BY | CHOUDHURY & CHOUDHURY, | CALCUTTA: | 1911.

7 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 4 $\frac{7}{8}$ ; Part I, pp. [2], x, vi, 2, 316; Part II, pp. 94, 2.

The author writes in the "Apologia": "In presenting Sree Krishna as The Soul of India, I may be accused of sectarian prepossessions. But Krishna is not here presented as a sectarian Ideal; but as the Principle and Personality in and through whom, as in the past so also in the present and even in the future, the great Indian Synthesis was, is being, and will be worked.

"The Soul of Europe and America is Christ: the Soul of India is, in the same way, Sree Krishna."

The first part of the book consists of four "Letters" on *Fundamental Consideration, The Name and the Thing, India: The Mother and Religious India*. The second part consists of the following articles: *Some World Problems, The Problem of Civilisation, The Problem of Nationality and Empire*. "The articles in Part II appeared in *The Modern Review* above the name of E. Willis."

There is an announcement, at the end, of the following book by Bipin Chandra Pal, to 'be shortly published':

THE PEOPLE OF INDIA (A CONSTRUCTIVE STUDY OF THE SOCIAL & ECONOMIC LIFE & INSTITUTIONS OF INDIA,) a companion volume "promised in the "Author's Apologia."

## 12

A FEDERAL HOME RULE ASSOCIATION FOR INDIA.  
CALCUTTA, 1915. 7 pp.

I have not seen a copy. The entry is taken from the British Museum Catalogue.

## 13

NATIONALITY AND EMPIRE | A RUNNING STUDY OF SOME  
CURRENT | INDIAN PROBLEMS | BY | BIPIN CHANDRA PAL | CALCUTTA  
& SIMLA | THACKER, SPINK & CO 1916

7 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 4 $\frac{7}{8}$ ; pp. xxxiv, 416.

The Introduction (vii-xxxiii) is dated 15 January, 1916.

# CONTENTS :

*Problems of Nationality and Empire; Hindu Nationalism; What It Stands for; The Positive Value of Nationalism; Nationalism and Politics; The Present Indian Problem; National Independence, or Imperial Federation?; Provincial Autonomy; The Delhi Transfer; Indian Council,- Reforms and Indian Culture; Lord Morley's "Reforms" and the Indian Problem; The Executive Government of India; Fight against Anarchism in India; The Problem of Political Crimes in India; An Indian Boy-Scout Movement; Crime and Karma; The New Indian Educational Policy; India and Imperial Preference; Pan-Islamism and Indian Nationalism.*

## 14

MRS. ANNIE BESANT | A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY | BY | BEPIN CHANDRA PAL | GANESH & CO., | PUBLISHERS, MADRAS.

4 $\frac{7}{8}$  × 3 $\frac{1}{8}$ ; pp. [viii], 16, 725, 3. [16] advt. of the publishers.

The author's "Apologia" is dated 10 August, 1917, in the course of which he writes :

"Part of it is a reprint of a Character-Sketch published in the *Hindu Review*. The original idea of the publishers was to reprint that Sketch with a few additional pages dealing with Mrs. Besant's political activities...I could not allow an old and scrappy sketch to go out to the public now [after her internment by the Government of Madras]...I had to write and post the new matter also from day to day without being able to examine the book as a whole. The character-sketch of Mrs. Besant published in 1913 and reprinted in the first few pages of this book was based upon my *impressions* of her life and writings...They were, however, outside impressions only. I had not as yet the privilege of personal acquaintance with her...Since then, I have met her: and, what is more have, in my humble way, been a co-worker with her in a common cause. This kinship has revealed to me to-day the inner soul of this great Fighter for Truth and Freedom, more intimately than before..."

## 15

RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT | BY | BIPIN CHANDRA PAL | CALCUTTA: | BANNERJEE, DAS & CO., | BOOK-SELLERS & PUBLISHERS, | CORNWALLIS BUILDINGS. | 1917. | ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

-/8/-

6 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ ; pp. [ii], 149.

## CONTENTS :

1. *India and the Empire.*  
A speech delivered at Lucknow, 25 October 1916.
2. *Responsible Government.*  
A speech delivered on 22 November 1917.
3. *Our Demands.*  
A speech delivered on 12 December 1917.
4. *The New Policy.*  
A speech delivered on 18 November 1917.

16

## THE NEW POLICY.

I have not seen a copy. Miss Elaine Langdon, who is engaged in research at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, on the life and times of Bipinchandra Pal, mentions this book in a letter.

17

INDIAN NATIONALISM : | ITS PRINCIPLES AND PERSONALITIES |  
BY | B. C. PAL | S. R. MURTHY & CO. | TRIPPLICANE, MADRAS, S.E.

7 × 4 $\frac{3}{4}$  ; pp. [viii], vi, 238.

The Foreword is dated November 1918.

## CONTENTS :

*Rabindranath Tagore ; Taraknath Palit ; Bal Gangadhar Tilak ; Surendra Nath Banerjee ; Asvini Kumar Datta ; I & II ; Aravinda Ghose ; Krishna Kumar Mitra ; Syam Sunder Chakravarty ; Manoranjan Guha-Thakurta ; Sister Nivedita.*

These essays have been reprinted in CHARACTER SKETCHES (1957).

SEE THE SPIRIT OF INDIAN NATIONALISM (1910).

18

THE | WORLD SITUATION | AND OURSELVES. | BY |  
BEPIN CHANDRA PAL. | TO BE HAD OF :— | MESSRS. | BANNERJEE, DAS  
& CO., | BOOK-SELLERS & PUBLISHERS | CORNWALLIS BUILDINGS, |  
CALCUTTA, | 1919.

6 $\frac{3}{4}$  × 4 $\frac{3}{4}$  ; pp. 64.

There is no title-page ; details are taken from the front cover.

## CONTENTS :

A speech at the Anti-Peace Celebration Meeting, Calcutta on 12 December, 1919.

A speech on the World situation, at Calcutta on 14 December, 1919.

A third speech begins at page 56, paragraph 2, according to a correction slip.

## 19

SIR ASHUTOSH MOOKHERJEE | A CHARACTER STUDY | BY |  
BIPIN CHANDRA PAL | PUBLISHED BY | DEVA PRASAD DATTA | 32,  
SIMLA STREET, CALCUTTA. | RE 1/8/-

7 $\frac{1}{8}$  × 5; pp. [ii], 88.

According to the Bengal Library Catalogue, the book was published in 1920.

## 20

THE NEW ECONOMIC | MENACE TO INDIA | BY | BIPIN  
CHANDRA PAL | MADRAS | GANESH & CO. | 1920 | PRICE RS. 2

7 × 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ ; pp. [vi], 250, 6 pages of advertisement.

## CHAPTERS :

*Question of Imperial Federation; The Composition of the British Empire; Empirical Imperialism; The Solution of the Times-Milner School; The Double Task before British Imperialism; The War and the Old Imperialism; Programme of After-War Reconstruction; The "Trustee" idea; The "Trustee" with "Adverse Interests"; What the Trustee has not done; "Administration" and "Exploitation"; Foreign Capital and National Autonomy; Dominant British Economic Thought; Munition Board and Industrial Commission; The War-Debt—How to meet it?; "Empire Resources Development Committee"; Reviving the Old "Congo Regime"; Lord Balfour of Burleigh's Committee; Social Influences in Exploitation; "Mobilisation of India's Agricultural Resources"; American and Japanese Invasion of the Indian Market; Honorary War-Work and Economic Exploitation; Indian Participation in the Company "Boom"; Organic Relation Between Industrialism and Imperialism; Dangers of Imitating European Industrialism in India; The Resume; Alliance with British Labour Party; Community of Self-interest; Organise Indian Labour; All Excess-Profits must be Taxed; Conditions of the Problem; In Defence of Our Culture.*

## 21

NON-CO-OPERATION | (FOUR LECTURES) | BIPIN CHANDRA PAL |  
PUBLISHED BY | SAMARENDRA KUMAR NAG, | THE | INDIAN BOOK  
CLUB. | COLLEGE STREET MARKET, CALCUTTA. | 1920

7×4 $\frac{3}{8}$ ; pp. [ii], 113.

Four lectures delivered at Calcutta, the fourth lecture being on "Non-Co-operation and the Khilafat", prior to the Special Session of the Indian National Congress (September 1920) which discussed the Non-Co-Operation programme.

## 22

BENGAL PROVINCIAL CONFERENCE | SESSION, BARISAL—1921 |  
PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS | BY | BIPIN CHANDRA PAL | PUBLISH-  
ER—SURESH CHANDRA DEB | 55-B | SANKARIPARA ROAD, | CALCUTTA.

7 $\frac{1}{4}$ ×4 $\frac{3}{8}$ ; pp. 124.

There is no title-page ; details are taken from the front cover.  
Published April 1921.

## 23

SWARAJ | THE GOAL AND THE WAY | BIPIN CHANDRA PAL |  
UPENDRA PUBLISHING HOUSE, | 17, NARAYANA MUDALI STREET, |  
MADRAS

6 $\frac{5}{8}$ ×4 $\frac{3}{8}$ ; pp. vi, 120.

A reprint of PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS, Bengal Provincial Conference, Barisal, 1921, with a new Foreword by the author, dated 24 April 1921.

## 24

DEMOCRATIC SWARAJ. 1921

I have not seen a copy. Miss Elaine Langdon mentions this book in a letter.

## 25

SWARAJ | WHAT IS IT ? | AND | HOW TO ATTAIN IT ? |  
(WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE PRESENT SITUATION AND THE |  
CONGRESS PROGRAMME) | ...BIPIN CHANDRA PAL... | PUBLISHED  
BY | VADHWANI & CO, | ... KHATAU MANSIONS, GIRGAUM TRAM  
TERMINUS BOMBAY | PRICE EIGHT ANNAS 25TH DECEMBER 1922

7 $\frac{1}{4}$ ×4 $\frac{3}{8}$ ; pp. [ii], 42.

There is no title-page in the copy seen by me ; details are taken from the front cover.



## 26

THE INDIAN LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY | THE DELHI SESSION. | (FEBRUARY & MARCH, 1924). | A PERSONAL NARRATIVE | BY | BIPIN CHANDRA PAL. | PUBLISHED BY— | JNANANJAN PAL, M.A. | P53 D, RUSSA ROAD SOUTH, BHAWANIPORE, | CALCUTTA. | PRICE ANNAS EIGHT ONLY.

$8\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{1}{4}$ ; pp. xvi, 104.

A report by the author, to his constituency, of the work of the Assembly during the session February-March 1924. The following speeches by the author in the Indian Legislative Assembly are included :

1. On T. Rangachariar's Resolution for granting Full Self-Governing Dominion Status to India; pp. 37-53.
2. On the Budget; pp. 64-75.
3. On the Resolution for repealing Bengal Regulation III of 1818 and similar other Regulations and Laws; pp. 79-84.
4. On Amalgamation of Indian Territorial Force with Auxiliary Force; pp. 85-89.
5. On Provision of Conveniences for Indian Railway Passenger; pp. 89-95.
6. On Grievances of The Sikh Community; pp. 95-99.
7. On Obscene Publications; pp. 100-103.

Speeches by Sir Malcolm Hailey, Pandit Motilal Nehru, V.J. Patel on 1 and/or 2 are also included, to provide the context of the author's speeches. In the introductory pages (i-xv) the author relates the position taken up by different parties in the Assembly with regard to 'the National Demand' for Dominion Status and the Budget, and explains his own standpoint.

## 27

BRAHMO SAMAJ AND THE | BATTLE OF SWARAJ IN INDIA | BIPINCHANDRA PAL | PRINTED & PUBLISHED BY | TRIGUNANATH RAY | BRAHMO MISSION PRESS | 211, CORNWALLIS STREET, | CALCUTTA | 1926. | EIGHT ANNAS.

$7\frac{1}{8} \times 4\frac{7}{8}$ ; pp. [ii], 67.

*Bipinchandra Pal (born 7 November 1858) passed away on 20 May 1932. The following books have been published since his death:*

## 28

MEMORIES | OF | MY LIFE AND TIMES | BIPIN CHANDRA PAL. | CALCUTTA: | MODERN BOOK AGENCY | 10, COLLEGE SQUARE | 1932

$8\frac{1}{16} \times 5\frac{1}{4}$ ; pp. xiv, 465.

This is volume I, "In the Days of My Youth," covering the period 1858-1886.

#### CHAPTERS :

*Birth and Parentage ; Home Influence and Early Education ; School Days ; Domestic Life in Sylhet during My School-Days ; Social Life in Sylhet during My School-Days ; Village Life during My School-Days ; Early Religious Environments and Education ; Administration and Officialdom Sixty Years Ago ; The Closing Years of My School Life ; Student-Life in Calcutta ; The Birth of Our New Nationalism ; The New Stage and National Songs ; Nabagopal Mitra and the Hindu Mela ; Political and Administrative Changes during My College Days ; How I came to the Brahmo Samaj ; Father and Son ; The Sadharan Brahmo Samaj ; Orissa Fifty Years Ago ; "National" Education and Public Activities in Sylhet ; Madras Fifty Years Ago ; Lord Ripon and the New Political Awakening ; Hindu Religious Revival and Social Reaction ; The Triumph of Father Love.*

29

BENGAL VAISHNAVISM | BIPIN CHANDRA PAL | WITH A PREFACE BY MR. HIRENDRA NATH DATTA,... | CALCUTTA | MODERN BOOK AGENCY | 10, COLLEGE SQUARE | 1933

$7\frac{5}{8} \times 5$  ; pp. [vi], ii, 174.

The Preface is dated 16 October 1933.

#### CONTENTS :

*The Philosophy of the Absolute ; The Bengal Bhakti Cult ; Art in Bengal Vaishnavism ; Bengal Vaishnava Lyrics ; Social Reconstruction and Mass Movement in Bengal Vaishnavism ; The Promise of Bengal Vaishnavism and its Fulfilment. APPENDIX: The Doctrine of Incarnation according to Bengal School of Vaishnavism.*

30

POST-WAR STRUGGLE | FOR | CONSTITUTIONAL RECONSTRUCTION | IN INDIA | BEPIN CHANDRA PAL | CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY PRESS | 1934.

$9\frac{3}{4} \times 6\frac{1}{4}$  ; pp. 15.

The article is dated February 1932.

## 31

EUROPE ASKS : WHO IS SHREE KRISHNA | (LETTERS  
WRITTEN TO A CHRISTIAN FRIEND) | BIPIN CHANDRA PAL. | THE NEW  
INDIA PRINTING & PUBLISHING CO., LTD., | CALCUTTA | 1939.

7 $\frac{3}{8}$  × 5; pp. [iv], 176.

## CONTENTS :

*The Doctrine of Avatar or Incarnation ; Different classes of Avatars ;  
Yugavatars ; Mahavishnu and Narayana ; The Two Dominant Schools  
of Hindu Thought ; Vaishnavic Doctrine of Trinity ; Paramatman ;  
Bhagavan ; Bhagavan Shree Krishna ; Bhagavan Shree Krishna  
(contd.) ; Immortality of the Soul ; Source of Knowledge and Beauty ;  
Synthesis of our Experiences ; Kingdom of Heaven.*

## 32

MEMORIES | OF | MY LIFE AND TIMES | VOL II | (1886—  
1900) | BIPIN CHANDRA PAL | YUGAYATRI PRAKASHAK LIMITED |  
CALCUTTA | 1951

8 $\frac{5}{8}$  × 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ ; pp. x, LXII, 296.

## CHAPTERS :

*Introduction ; In the Role of a Zemindar ; Second Session of the  
Congress ; With the "Tribune" of Lahore ; Subjects Committee of  
the Congress ; Fourth Session of the Congress ; Swami Dayananda  
and the Arya Samaj ; the Congress of 1889 ; Through the Shadow of  
Death ; The Consent Bill Agitation (1890-92) ; In the Service of the  
Brahmo Samaj ; Bijaykrishna Goswami ; Bijaykrishna and the  
Brahmo Samaj ; My Initiation by Bijaykrishna Goswami ; My First  
Visit to England ; Five Months in the States.*

## 33

BEGINNING OF | FREEDOM MOVEMENT IN | MODERN  
INDIA | ...BIPINCHANDRA PAL | YUGAYATRI PRAKASHAK LIMITED |  
CALCUTTA. | 1954

8 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ ; pp. [iv], 61, Notes (xiv), (ii).

Introduction to MEMORIES OF MY LIFE AND TIMES, Vol. 2 (1951),  
reprinted separately, with Notes.

## 34

WRITINGS AND SPEECHES | OF | BIPIN CHANDRA PAL | (VOL.  
I. PART ONE) | MAY, 1954 | YUGAYATRI PRAKASHAK LIMITED | CAL-  
CUTTA.

8 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 5 $\frac{3}{8}$ ; pp. [i], iii, vi, iv, 5-24, 1-24, 1-10.

There is no title-page ; details are taken from the front cover.

# CONTENTS :

## *In the Days of My Youth.*

The first two chapters of MEMORIES OF MY LIFE AND TIMES (1932), Vol. I

## *On the Repeal of the Arms Act.*

Speech at the Indian National Congress, 1887.

*Basis of Political Reforms*, (1889).

A reprint of No. 1.

*Raja Rammohan Roy* (30 September 1901).

*Raja Rammohan Roy* (2 October 1902).

These two essays are reprinted here from THE NEW SPIRIT (1907), and have since been reprinted in CHARACTER SKETCHES (January 1957)

# 35

WRITINGS AND SPEECHES | OF | BIPIN CHANDRA PAL | (VOL. I.  
PART TWO) | JULY, 1954 | YUGAYATRI PRAKASHAK LIMITED | CALCUTTA.

8 $\frac{5}{16}$  × 5 $\frac{3}{8}$ ; pp. [ii], 25-40, 25-64, 11-16.

# CONTENTS :

## 1. *In the Days of My Youth*

The third chapter of MEMORIES OF MY LIFE AND TIMES, Vol. I, (1952)

## 2-4. "Nation-Building" (1904)

## 5. *The Message of Indian History* (1904)

## 6. *Contribution of Islam to Indian Nationality* (1907)

## 7. *Sri Krishna : The Prophet of Race Fusion in India* (1905)

## 8. *Keshub Chunder Sen* (1902)

2-4, and 5, 7 & 8 are reprinted from THE NEW SPIRIT (1907).

6 was delivered as an address to The Young Men's Mahomedan Association, Madras; (See No. 6.)

8 has been reprinted in CHARACTER SKETCHES (1957).

# 36

SWADESHI & SWARAJ | (THE RISE OF NEW PATRIOTISM) | BIPIN-  
CHANDRA PAL | YUGAYATRI PRAKASHAK LIMITED | CALCUTTA-6 |  
1954

8 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ ; pp. [iv], ii, vi, ii, 295, index x.

The book is a new edition of THE NEW SPIRIT (1907); the following articles have been omitted :

*Hindu Nationalism*

*Reform of "National Line"*

*The National Problem*

The following additional essays from *New India* have been included :

*Agitation or Organisation* (29 July 1905)

*The Partition Agitation* (5 August 1905)

*Passing and Making Resolutions* (12 August 1905)

*Professions of Loyalty and Patriotic Service of India* (12 August 1905)

The author's Preface to THE NEW SPIRIT is also reprinted.

The book also includes the following five lectures delivered in Madras in 1907 :

*The New Movement*

*The Gospel of Swaraj*

*Swaraj : its Ways & Means*

*Boycott*

*National Education*

and a speech on the resolution on Boycott at the Calcutta (1906) session of the Indian National Congress:

*Boycott of Association with Government*

### 37

CHARACTER SKETCHES | BIPINCHANDRA PAL | YUGAYATRI  
PRAKASHAK LIMITED | CALCUTTA : INDIA

8½ × 5½; pp. viii, 263.

Published January, 1957.

#### CONTENTS :

1. *Raja Rammohun Roy* (1901)
2. *Raja Rammohun Roy II* (1902)
3. *Keshub Chunder Sen* (1902)
4. *Surendranath Banerjea* (1913)
5. *Bal Gangadhar Tilak* (1914)
6. *Asvini Kumar Datta I* (1909,) II
7. *Aravinda Ghosh* (1909)
8. *Sister Nivedita* (1914)
9. *Rabindranath Tagore* (1913)
10. *Rabindranath Tagore II* (1931)
11. *Mrs. Annie Besant* (1917)
12. *Ananda Mohan Bose* (1926)
13. *Tarak Nath Palit* (1914)
14. *Ashutosh Mukherjea* (1920)
15. *Krishna Kumar Mitra* (1909)

16. *Syamsundar Chakravorty* (1909)
17. *Monoranjan Guha-Thakurta* (1909)

1, 2 and 3 are reprinted from *THE NEW SPIRIT* (1907) ;  
 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 15, 16 and 17 are reprinted from *INDIAN NATIONALISM : ITS PRINCIPLES AND PERSONALITIES* (1918) ; 11 and 14 are abridged versions of the books *MRS. ANNIE BESANT : A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY* (1917) and *SIR ASHUTOSH MOOKHERJEE : A CHARACTER STUDY* (1920) respectively.

7 was published earlier separately as a pamphlet; see No. 8.

10 is reprinted from *THE GOLDEN BOOK OF TAGORE* (1931), and 12 was published in *The Englishman*.

#### TWO UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPTS

It is understood that Bipinchandra Pal, in the closing years of his life, had prepared two monographs, one on Anandamohan Bose, his life and times, and the other on Keshub Chunder Sen. These remain unpublished.

#### BOOKS WITH WRITINGS BY BIPINCHANDRA PAL

##### 1

...KESHUB | AS SEEN BY HIS OPPONENTS | ...COMPILED  
 BY | G. C. BANERJI | ...BRAHMO ERA 100 | 1930

7×4½; pp. [viii], 131, lxiv.

An extract from an address on Keshub Chunder Sen by Bipinchandra Pal (8 January 1893) appears on pp. 29-42.

A report of an address on Keshub Chunder Sen by Bipinchandra Pal (22 August 1928) is reprinted in pp. 42-45 from *Nava-Vidhan*, 6 September, 1928.

##### 2

THE GOLDEN BOOK OF TAGORE | A HOMAGE TO RABINDRANATH TAGORE | FROM INDIA AND THE WORLD | IN CELEBRATION OF HIS SEVENTIETH BIRTHDAY | EDITED BY RAMANANDA CHATTERJEE | PUBLISHED BY THE GOLDEN BOOK COMMITTEE | CALCUTTA 1931

11½×8½; pp. xxii, 374, 2.

Bipinchandra Pal contributed :  
*Rabindranath and Bengal*, pp. 188-191  
 Reprinted in *CHARACTER SKETCHES* (1957).

## 3

THE FATHER OF MODERN INDIA | COMMEMORATION  
VOLUME | OF THE | RAMMOHUN ROY CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS,  
1933 | COMPILED & EDITED BY | SATIS CHANDRA CHAKRAVARTI... |  
RAMMOHUN ROY CENTENARY COMMITTEE | 210-6, CORNWALLIS  
STREET | CALCUTTA | NOVEMBER, 1935

9×6; pp. xl, 190; [vi] viii, 572.

Extracts from the following articles by Bipinchandra Pal on Rammohun Roy are published in Part II, Section B :

1. Raja Rammohun Roy (1901), from THE NEW SPIRIT (1907).
2. Calcutta and The Cultural Evolution of Modern India, from the *Calcutta Municipal Gazette*, 22 December 1928.

## 4

'BANDE MATARAM' | AND | INDIAN NATIONALISM |  
(1906-1908)... | BY | PROF. HARIDAS MUKHERJEE | AND | PROF. UMA  
MUKHERJEE | FIRMA K.L. MUKHOPADHYAY | 6/1-A, BANCHHARAM  
AKRUR LANE, CALCUTTA-12 | SEPTEMBER, 1957

7½×4½; pp. 96.

The following editorial articles by Bipinchandra Pal are reprinted from *Bande Mataram*, Weekly Edition, June 14, 1908:

*The Bed-rock of Indian Nationalism I-II*, pp. 88-96

Those who wish to study the life and times of Bipinchandra Pal should find considerable material in the Reports of the annual sessions of the Indian National Congress and the Bengal Provincial Conference upto 1920, in which his speeches are reproduced. Of these, only one, the speech on the Arms Act at the third session of the Indian National Congress, Madras, 1887, is now available in book form (See No. 34). We note below two Reports of the Proceedings of the Bengal Provincial Conference held at Calcutta :

## 5

THE REPORT | OF THE | PROCEEDINGS | OF THE | BENGAL  
PROVINCIAL CONFERENCE | HELD IN CALCUTTA | 25TH,  
26TH AND 27TH OCTOBER, 1888...

7½×5; pp. [ii], 117.

Bipinchandra Pal's lecture in moving a resolution proposing appointment of an independent commission to enquire into the condition of the coolies in the tea-gardens of Assam, appears on pp. 2-16.

Bipinchandra Pal's lecture on Police interference with religious, political and other societies appear on pp. 46-47.

## 6

THE REPORT | OF THE | PROCEEDINGS | OF THE | BENGAL  
PROVINCIAL CONFERENCE | HELD IN CALCUTTA | ON | 29TH  
AND 30TH OCTOBER, 1891. | ...1892

8½ × 5¼; pp. x, 89, xviii.

Bipinchandra Pal's lecture in moving the resolution on the Assam Coolies appears on pp. 19-21.

Bipinchandra Pal's lecture in opposing the resolution on the policy of Government in relation to embankments appears on pp. 83-84.

## BENGALI

## 1

## SOBHANA

I have seen an incomplete copy of this novel, presumably of the first edition; the title-page is partly torn, but the copy includes a Preface by the author dated 11 Magh 1290. (January 1884).

A second impression of the book was published in Kartik, 1310 (pp. [iv], 212).

A third impression of the book was issued in 1329 B.E.

The author has used the pseudonym "Haridas Bharati." The book is included in the list of works of Bipinchandra Pal appended to his life-sketch in Mukul C. Dey's *TWELVE PORTRAITS* (Amal Home, 1917)

The book bears the sub-title "Bhabishya Itihaser ekti Adhyaya," or A Chapter from the History of the Future, and may be described as a "patriotic" story.

## 2

## BHARAT SIMANTE RUSS. VOLUME 1.

Pp. [ii], 118

Like some other early works of Bipinchandra Pal, the title-page of the book does not bear the name of the author. It is mentioned in the list of works of Bipinchandra Pal published in Mukul C. Dey's *TWELVE PORTRAITS* (Amal Home, 1917).

The title-page bears the date 1292. The author's Preface is dated Jaistha (May-June), 1885.



## 3

SAKHA-SAMPADAK SVARGIYA PRAMADACHARAN SEN

Pp. [iv], 88. 1887

Bipinchandra Pal writes in his *MY LIFE AND TIMES*, II, pp. 19-20: "In the beginning of this year [1887], I wrote another small biography, the life of Babu Pramada Charan Sen, the editor of the first Bengalee journal specially written for our juvenile population, the *SAKHA*. Pramada Charan had been an intimate friend of mine. He gave promise of a brilliant and useful career in the field of literature and journalism in Bengal. ... My life of Pramada Charan was meant to be a memorial volume, a tribute of his friends to him."

The book does not have the author's name on the title-page; it is dedicated to "Dearest Nritya" or "Nrityakali," wife of the author. The title-page bears the date 1887; the dedication-page bears the date 11 Magh, Brahmo Samvat 57.

## 4

BHARATESVARI MAHARANI VICTORIA

Pp. 353. 1887.

Bipinchandra Pal writes in *MY LIFE AND TIMES*, II, p. 18 : "1887 was the Jubilee Year of Queen Victoria's reign, and I was moved to take advantage of it to write a biography of Her Majesty. The life of Victoria made a strong appeal to me on account of her character far more than because of her high position as the head of the British Empire. In writing this book I had to read up a good deal of the literature of her times. ... I published it myself, and though it cost me nearly a thousand rupees I was not a loser by this venture."

This book also did not have the author's name on the title-page; a second edition was published in 1896 in which the name of the author appeared on the front cover. A third edition was issued (in 1904?) under the title *RAJNIMATA VICTORIA*.

It should be mentioned that I have not seen any copy of 1-4 with covers; these covers might have carried the author's name.

## 5

SUBODHINI OR MORAL AND OBJECT LESSONS IN BENGALI

Pp. vi, 80. 1892.

The Preface is dated 12 April 1892.

## 6

## BHAKTI-SADHAN . . . . PART ONE

Pp. [ii], ii, 104. 1894.

A collection of translations of sermons by Theodore Parker.

## 7

## BRAHMO-DHARMA, JATIYA O SARVABHAUMIK

Pp. 25.

A paper read before the Tattva-Vidya Sabha, Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, Calcutta.

The title-page bears the date 1302 B.E.

## 8

## JAILER KHATA

Pp. [vi], 106.

This "Prison Diary" was written during six months' imprisonment to which the author was sentenced in 1907 for his refusal to give evidence when Aurobindo Ghosh was prosecuted on a charge of publishing seditious articles in the *Bande Mataram*. The book is a record of the author's spiritual thoughts and experiences, "Realization in jail of God" in the words of Aurobindo Ghosh.

The title-page bears the date 1316. The Introduction is dated March 1910.

## 9

## CHARIT-KATHA

Pp. [iv], 286.

The book contains character-sketches of Surendranath Banerjea, Asvinikumar Datta, Gurudas Banerjee, Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya, Sivanath Sastri, Rabindranath Tagore, Akshay-chandra Sarkar, William T. Stead, and Sir Taraknath Palit; and an essay on "THE PASSING OF THE TITANIC."

The title-page bears the date 1323.

## 10

## SATYA O MITHYA

Pp. [iv], 184.

A collection of five short stories.

The title-page bears the date Magh, 1323.

## 11

## AMAR RASHTRIYA MATAVAD

Pp. 15

A statement of the author's political views, in reply to his critics.  
Reprinted from *Nabya Bharat*, Jaistha 1329 B.E.

## 12

## PRABARTAK VIJAYAKRISHNA

Pp. [iv], 142.

The first part of a dissertation on Bijaykrishna Goswami, which the author had proposed to complete in three parts.  
The verso of the title-page bears the date Akhsaya-Tritiya, 1341.

## 13

## NAVAYUGER BANGLA

Pp. [vi], ii, 303.

The book is divided into sixteen chapters on the Genius of Bengal; Rammohun Roy; Influence of English Education: Rationalism and Individualism; Brahmo Samaj and Devendranath Tagore; Brahmo Samaj and Keshub Chunder Sen; Brahmo Samaj and the Battle for Freedom (two chapters); Rajnarain Bose; Hindu Mela and Nabagopal Mitra; Bankimchandra (four chapters); Drama and Stage; Surendranath Banerjea; Surendranath Banerjea and Anandamohan Bose. An incomplete essay on Girischandra Ghose is published in the appendix.  
The verso of the title-page bears the date Vaisakh 1362.

## 14

## MARKINE CHARI MAS

Pp. iv, 112.

An account of the author's tour of the United States of America in 1900.  
The verso of the title-page bears the date Bhadra, 1362.

## 15

## RASHTRANITI

Pp. [viii], 95.

A collection of twelve essays (1319-41 B.E.) on political and socio-logical topics.  
The verso of the title-page bears the date Bhadra, 1363.

## HINDI

## 1

BIPIN VYAKHYANMALA, TRANSLATED AND PUBLISHED BY  
CHHABILDAS, RAMDAS SAMANTA, OF BOMBAY. PRICE ANNAS FOUR.

"This Nagri booklet of 87 pages is a collection of some of the best speeches of Babu Bipin Chandra Pal. His utterances at the third Indian National Congress, at Madras, against the Arms Act (with which the book begins), as also on some other subjects are contained in it."

I have not seen a copy. The notice of the book is taken from *The Modern Review* for March, 1909, "Reviews of Books."

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THIS BIBLIOGRAPHY was undertaken at short notice, and bears traces of haste. Only some well-known collections in Calcutta could be reached; measurements (which are in inches) had to be taken in some cases from re-bound copies; some bibliographical details have been omitted in the case of books in Bengali (of which a fuller bibliography is in preparation); in some cases, Book Reviews and Catalogues of Libraries abroad had to be depended upon as the books were not available for inspection. This bibliography should therefore be considered as tentative. It may yet be of some help to students of the life and times of Bipinchandra Pal; it mentions a number of titles which have been out of print for many years now.

Even this would not have been possible but for assistance freely and generously given by friends, among whom are Sri Jogananda Das, who has taken great pains to collect some rare books from libraries which I could not hope to reach; Sri Jnananjan Pal, Sri Sajanikanta Das and Sri Rameswar De, who have readily made their collections available for the purpose; Sri Chittaranjan Banerjee, through whose help it has been possible to record some items available in the British Museum; and Sri Jagadindra Bhaumik, who has collaborated with me by checking many of the entries with great assiduity and patience.

*November, 1958*



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